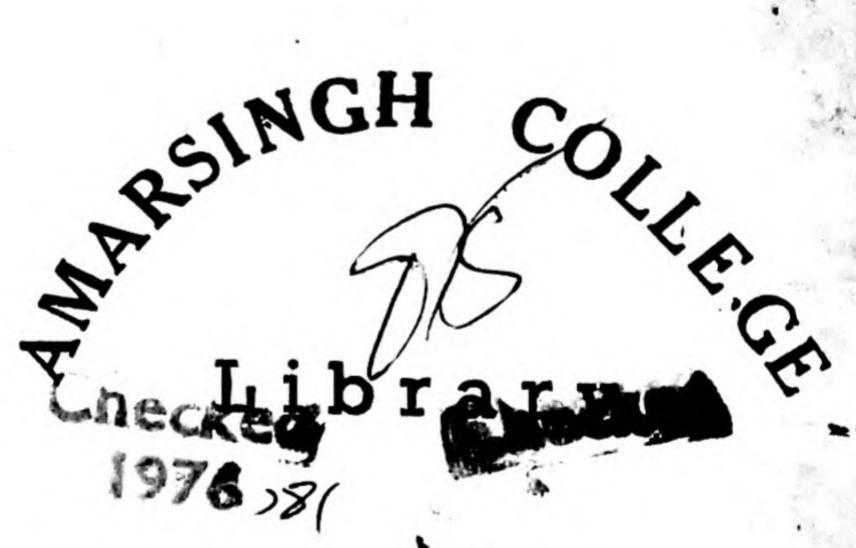
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THE JUDGMENT OF LAROSE

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

A dinguished house-party was assembled at Southdown Court, the home of Sir James Marley, when suddenly the peace of this country-house was shattered by the discovery of a terrible crime. One of the guests was found murdered!

Twenty-one persons with a murderer or murderess among them and no clues to indicate in which direction the guilt lay!

"And I tell you, Mr. Larose," exclaimed Inspector Roberts, "that among those scented and bejewelled women, or among those men of birth and breeding, with their silk underwear and dude clothes, there lurks a beast as stark and savage as in any in the lowest crime-haunts of the world."

Another thrilling adventure of the great international detective, Gilbert Larose.

For a list of titles by the same author see pages 313-4.

THE JUDGMENT OF LAROSE

BY ARTHUR GASK





First printing 1934

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THE JUDGMENT OF LAROSE

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THE JUDGMENT OF LAROSE

CHAPTER I

A POLICEMAN'S DAUGHTER

DEAREST MUM AND DAD,

I know you will have been anxious to hear from me and wondering why I haven't written at once, but as you can well guess, things have been dreadfully upset here, and really, I don't seem to have had a moment to

spare.

These last three days have been a perfect nightmare for everyone. The place has been full of policemen and detectives, and now, to cap all, we hear that the terrible Gilbert Larose is coming, and that always means, so Mr. Slim says, a hanging for someone. Mr. Slim—he is the butler here—calls Gilbert Larose the "Angel of Death," and says he is the greatest detective in all the world and that once he is on the spot they will find the murderer at once.

Of course, you read in the newspapers that I was the

first to find the body, and I shall never forget it.

When I drew the curtains and pulled up the blinds that morning and saw poor Captain Dane lying with the dreadful stain upon the carpet all round his head I went icy cold in horror, but I didn't faint and I didn't even scream and I am sure you would have been proud of me, for I was a true policeman's daughter.

I just held my breath for one moment and then ran out

quickly to get help.

But I will tell you everything from the beginning, from when I came here exactly eight days ago—it seems eight years to me, so much has happened—and then you will realize how dreadful we all feel, for it has been clearly proved, so the police say, that the murder was done by somebody inside the house. No one broke in—they are sure of that.

But isn't it awful, Dad? Some one of us here, someone I have been seeing every day, is a murderer and perhaps, even, I have been waiting upon him and standing at dinner behind his chair. The whole thing is a terrible scandal for Sir James and his lady, and I am so sorry for them, for really they are such nice people. They have only been married a few months and my lady is very

sweet and pretty.

Well, as you know, it was yesterday week that I came here and I was certain at once that I should like the situation. Everything is made as comfortable as possible for us and the food is very good. There are five of us girls and Mr. Slim, the butler, and the cook, Mrs. Salter, who is also the housekeeper, and outside there is Mr. Binks, the chauffeur, who lives with his wife in the lodge by the entrance gates.

I was kept on the go from the moment I came, for they were expecting a big house-party for the races at Goodwood, and the visitors began arriving on Saturday. Thirteen of them altogether, seven ladies and six gentle-

men.

Such swell-looking people! Real aristocrats every one of them. I think, however, we girls at once liked poor Captain Dane best of them all, for although he was not tall and big, he was so handsome and dashing and so pleasant to everyone. He always gave me a smile whenever I did anything for him and he had such winning ways with him.

Well, on the Tuesday, the day before the murder, they all went to Goodwood and we heard in the evening in the servants' hall that Captain Dane had won a tremendous lot of money at the races. He backed Gallant Boy

at fifty to one and from the talk in the billiard-room Mr. Slim learnt that he had won over two thousand pounds from the bookmakers and had got it all in banknotes.

They drank to his health that night at dinner, and it was a truly wonderful scene; just like one you see on the pictures. I can shut my eyes now and it all comes to me again. The great long table with the candlelights, the shining silver and the glasses and the flowers, and the magnificent dresses, and the diamonds, and the pearls. And they were all so bright and happy too, and in such high spirits. Her ladyship was perhaps a little quiet, but then she was busy all the time, looking after everybody, and so anxious that nothing should go wrong. Mr. Slim says that this is her first big house-party and he didn't wonder she was anxious, for she was only a poor clergyman's daughter before she married and she has had to learn everything since.

Well, after dinner they danced in the ballroom until nearly twelve o'clock, and I went up to bed dead sleepy, so it was a little later than usual the next morning—about five and twenty minutes to seven—when I went

into the billiard-room and found the dead body.

As I have told you, I didn't make any fuss, but I ran instantly to fetch Mr. Slim, and he, after one quick look at the poor captain, tore upstairs for the master. Sir James came down in his dressing-gown looking very white and shocked, and then, directly he had seen the body, he had the billiard-room door locked and tele-

phoned for the police.

Then the house became a prison and it has been like one ever since. The police swarmed over the place and no one was allowed to leave. Everyone was questioned by the detectives, and, one by one, we were taken into the library and examined and all our lives gone through. They took all our finger-prints and even I was glared at as if they had suspicions about me, and what poor Mr. Slim went through—Heaven only knows.

You see, they are so certain that the captain was killed by someone inside the house, because not only had none of the doors or windows on the ground floor been unbolted and none of the burglar alarms disturbed, but also, the lodge gates had been locked as usual all night and Noah and Esau, the two big Alsatian dogs, had been roaming loose in the grounds.

Well, as I say, for the first two days the police absolutely refused to allow anyone to leave and now, as they have still not found out anything, Sir James has made the guests agree all on their own accord to remain on as

long as the police require.

Some of them don't like it at all, but Mr. Slim says the master was very stern, and insisted that for the sake of everyone they ought all to help the law as much as they possibly could. They were all under a cloud, he said, and it was not fair that anyone should go away before everything was found out.

So here we are—the gay house-party with all the gayness gone out of it and all of us speaking in hushed

voices and going about like ghosts.

Her ladyship looks downright ill, and it is wonderful how she manages to bear up and continues to look after the comfort of all the others.

Well, I have told you some things you will not have read in the newspapers and now I'll reckon up three of the people who I think may have done the murder, because, as your daughter, I am sure I have some of the policeman instinct in me and can put two and two together in a way other people can't.

Now, one person I am suspicious of is a Colonel Mead here, for although he is as well dressed and swanky as anyone, we know he is hard up and being pressed for money. Yes, Dad, he is going to have summonses sent

to him.

Elsie found this out—she is one of the housemaids—from two letters she read in his room. They had fallen out of the pockets of one of his coats and she happened to glance over them, she says, before putting them back. One was from a cigar shop in Piccadilly where he owes over sixty pounds, and the other from a tailor in Regent

Street who wants nearly a hundred pounds, and they both threaten him with the courts if he doesn't pay up at once. Now what do you think of that?

Remember-whoever killed the captain robbed him of all those banknotes and what is more likely than that

this Colonel Mead did it to pay his debts?

Then there is another of the visitors I am doubtful about-a woman this time-the beautiful Lady Sylvia Drews.

She is a widow, very stylish and handsome, and getting on for forty, I should say. Everyone could see that she had started at once to make up furiously to the captain, and the night before the races when he was laughing and talking to Lady Marley I particularly noticed how angry she looked. She was as jealous as a cat, I am sure, and she might easily have given that blow with the poker that killed him, for I have seen her swinging her golfclubs and she is as strong as a man. I know she more than liked the captain, for you can trust one woman to see when another woman is in love.

Then there's another here that I am certain didn't like the captain—a barrister called Mr. Wardle, for I overheard him say once to Mr. Rainey, as I was serving tea, that he'd give short shift anyhow to someone, and I'm sure they were talking about the captain, because they. were looking at him and I have an instinct that with all his cleverness this Mr. Wardle is a cruel, unscrupulous

man.

You see, the poor captain would never have been a great favourite with men because he was so handsome, and no girl could help admiring him. And he knew it too. Mr. Slim was always saying that he looked at us girls, even, as if we would drop on to his knees the moment he asked us to. Mr. Slim hated him.

Well, here we all are, waiting for something to happen, just like a lot of frightened prisoners huddled up together, with one of us condemned to die and the hang-

man coming to morrow.

Thank goodness I'm not burly like you, Dad, and

haven't got a strong, muscular arm, for no one can really think I could have done the murder, because, Mr. Slim says, it was a tremendous smashing blow that caused the poor captain's death.

Well, good-bye; I'll write to you again soon after that wonderful Larose has been and found out everything.

Your loving daughter,

BETTY.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN WHO NEVER FAILED

ND I am certain, Mr. Larose," frowned Inspector Roberts of the Eastbourne police, motioning his visitor to a chair, "that we have got that murderer now actually under our hands, as surely as if he were shut up here in the cells." His lips curled disdainfully. "Among those scented and bejewelled women or among those men of birth and breeding, with their silk underwear and their dude clothes "-he shrugged his shoulders-" lurks a beast as stark and savage as in any of the lowest crime haunts of the world." His voice trailed away to a deep sigh. "But the devil of it is we don't know which among them the wretch is."

Gilbert Larose settled himself comfortably in his chair. He was a boyish-looking man in the late twenties, and of so ordinary an appearance that no one would have imagined for one moment that he was a tracker-down of crime of international reputation. He had a pleasant, happy face, with a humorous mouth and smiling eyes.

His expression, however, was an alert one.

"Yes, sir," went on the inspector with a smile, "and now we are depending upon you"—he looked very amused—"the man who never fails."

Larose smiled back. "Well, we'll put our heads together, Inspector, and see if we can't find out something." He nodded gravely. "They think a lot of you up at the Yard, and I was told this morning that I should

find your report as thorough and searching as I could wish."

Inspector Roberts flushed. "I've been night and day on the job since Wednesday," he replied earnestly, "and I don't think you'll find that I have left many stones unturned." He pulled a sheaf of papers towards him. "Now, you are, of course, familiar with the main outlines of the case; you--"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Larose quickly, "but please give me your own version of everything just as if I'd heard nothing at all. Then I can put out of my mind a lot that I've read in the newspapers and start right off

without any wrong ideas."
"Good!" exclaimed the inspector. "Then I'll begin when they phoned us here." And he at once

commenced in a crisp and business-like tone:

"On Wednesday last at six-forty a.m. we received a telephone call from Sir James Marley of Southdown Court informing us that a guest staying there had met with a violent death during the night and asking us to come immediately. I happened to have come here very early upon another matter, and so within a quarter of an hour, along with two of my men, was up at the Court. The lodge gates had to be unlocked to let our car through. We were informed that, as was the usual custom, they had been closed throughout the night and-with the discovery of the murder-Sir James had instantly given orders that they would not be opened until we arrived, so we were the first to pass since just before midnight, when they had been shut; therefore-"

"One moment, please," interrupted Larose curiously. "But why are these gates always kept locked at night?

Surely it's not generally done in places like this."

"Perhaps not," replied the inspector grimly; "but I may tell you in passing that there have been quite a number of burglaries lately at good-class residences about here, and so far, unfortunately, we have not been able to lay their perpetrators by the heels. So Sir James Marley's chauffeur, who lives at the lodge, has orders to

lock the gates the last thing, and also, by the by, to loose two big Alsatian dogs to run free in the grounds."
"Ah!" exclaimed Larose, "that's interesting, but go

on."

"Well, arriving at the house," continued the inspector, "we learnt that the murder had taken place in the billiard-room, and that the body had been discovered by one of the parlourmaids, Betty Yates, when she went in to draw up the blinds about five and twenty minutes to seven. Sir James had then immediately had the door of the billiard-room locked, and so we arrived upon the scene of the crime with everything absolutely undisturbed. The dead man was Captain Hector Dane, and he was one of thirteen guests who were staying at the Court for the Goodwood week. Here are close-up pictures of him exactly as he lay." And the inspector handed over four mounted photographs of a large size.

There was a long silence as Larose regarded the

prints, and then the inspector went on:

"Killed by one sharp blow over the temple, bone completely crushed in. There was also a slight cut on the lobe of the left ear. Undoubtedly killed with the poker that we found thrown on to the fire. Undoubtedly again, from splashes of blood upon the carpet, upon the lower part of one leg of the trousers, and upon one of his shoes, he was struck when standing up and facing his murderer, and from the other marks of blood, he fell backwards on to that settee and then slipped down on to the floor. Then apparently he did not move again. No signs of a struggle anywhere and nothing disarranged in the room. As I say-killed by that poker that was then thrown on to the fire. The evening had been chilly and there had been a fire burning since about eight o'clock and the assassin took a sure way of getting rid of any incriminating finger-marks. The body was not stiff when we found it, and the medical evidence is that deceased had been dead between five and six hours. In the warm room there the setting-in of rigor mortis had been retarded."

Larose made no comment and after waiting an appreciable time for his information to sink in, the inspector went on:

"Well, we found very little to help us. Nothing had been disturbed anywhere in the house. No cries had been heard and no sounds of anyone moving about during the night. The only thing we know is that deceased was intending to be the last to go to bed, three of the other guests, Dr. Merryweather, Mr. Wardle and Mr. Donald Culloden, having left him alone in the billiardroom when they went upstairs. He had told them he was feeling chilly and should be sitting on for a few minutes before the fire."

"And when those three went upstairs," asked Larose, were the lights out all over the house—on the ground floor, I mean—except, of course, in the billiard-room?"

"No," replied the inspector; "there was one light, a small pilot light, in the hall. It is always left on all night, Sir James tells me, in case any of the guests should want to come down for anything, to get a book from the library, for instance, if they can't sleep"—he grinned—" or to obtain more alcoholic refreshment possibly, if they have not already had enough. There are always brandy and whisky left handy on the buffet in the billiardroom."

"Oh!" exclaimed Larose thoughtfully. "In the

billiard-room. Well-go on."

"Now, as to motive," said the inspector, "and here at any rate we were at once of opinion that we were on pretty firm ground. It was known by everyone at the Court that the deceased had won two thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds in ready-money bets at Goodwood that day, and the money was not to be found. It was all in banknotes and when at dinner we know he had actually got them upon his person in his hip pocket, for, in answer to a query from one of the women there, a Mrs. Donald Culloden, he told them all openly so, in front of the domestics, even, who were waiting at table."

"Anyone see the notes?" asked Larose. "Is it sure

he had won all that money?"

"Sure," replied the inspector. "He was exhibiting the notes in the lounge when they were having drinks before going up to change for dinner."

"All right," nodded Larose; "go on."

"Well, of course our first line of enquiry," said the inspector, "was to try and find out if the party who did the killing had come in from outside, and we soon saw that there was no evidence at all in that direction. There was no sign of forcible entry in any part of the house, and all the doors and windows on the ground floor had been found that morning exactly as they had been left the previous night. All locked and bolted, as is the invariable custom, with none of the electric burglar alarms disturbed. Sir James is most insistent about this locking-up, for he has some very valuable silver and art treasures, and the butler goes round everywhere over the house the last thing at night. Then every inch of the walls and high railings enclosing the grounds was scrutinized and there was no sign of anyone having climbed over anywhere. We were helped there because no rain had fallen for more than a week, and the dust everywhere was undisturbed. We should certainly have picked up some traces if anyone had passed. Then again there are those two big Alsatians to be considered and it is highly improbable that any stranger could have crossed to the house without attracting their attention. It was bright moonlight until nearly three, and we are told they are always wandering about." He shook his head energetically. "No, no; the murderer came from inside, and we never had any doubt about it."

"And who searched the body?" asked Larose with

his eyes intent upon the photographs.

"Our Detective Howard here," replied the inspector, and he reached for a paper, "and these are what the pockets contained, I myself putting down each article as it was taken out. Trousers—right-hand pocket—two half-crowns, three shillings and two pence.

tree we progress.

Left-hand—bunch of keys, handkerchief and box of matches. Waistcoat-right-hand-gold pencil-case; lefthand-gold cigarette-case; jacket-breast pocket, wallet with four five-pound notes, consecutive numbers; twelve one-pound Treasury notes, all clean and of consecutive numbers; eleven postage stamps; eight visitingcards 'Captain Hector Dane, Malmesbury Chambers, Half Moon Street,' and motor driving licence." He looked up at the detective. "I may add that in the trunk in his bedroom we found afterwards, in a long envelope, with the inscription of the London and South-Western Bank on the flap, two hundred and thirty-five pounds in banknotes of varying denominations, all clean and uncirculated, and these notes in his wallet, from their numbering, we saw had been taken from that reserve." He nodded his head. "I presume it was his habit to carry on him in his evening clothes sufficient if they happened to have any bridge. They are apparently all wealthy people up at the Court, and I understand they play pretty high."

"Go on," said Larose, for the inspector had stopped

speaking.

"Well," went on the latter briskly, "I determined straight away that the murder had been committed by someone inside the house, and that therefore our enquiries could be narrowed down to twenty-one people; the five maids, the cook-housekeeper, the butler, Sir James and Lady Marley, and the thirteen guests that made up the house-party."

"And the chauffeur," interrupted Larose; "what

about him?"

"Oh, I am purposely leaving him out," replied the inspector, "because to bring him in would suppose collusion with someone inside the house, implying at once a premeditated crime, and if we are sure of one thing, Mr. Larose, it is that the murder was unpremeditated, for we know it was by chance only that the captain happened to be remaining alone in the billiard-room after the others had gone to bed that night."

Larose shook his head. "Chance, sir," he said, "may only come in that murder was committed in the billiardroom. The robbery may have been no chance at all and indeed, may have been definitely determined upon hours before. It was only the bad luck of the captain, perhaps, that murder had to precede robbery." He shrugged his shoulders. "The murder in the billiard-room was probably, as you say, unpremeditated, but the robberyno-that may have been a carefully-thought-out plan."

The inspector was silent, and the detective went on:
"And you found out nothing about anyone—no suspicious happenings pointing in any way to any of the servants or the guests?"

The inspector shook his head. "From the very moment we arrived we were up against a blank wall. We could light on nothing to help us and more than that, Mr. Larose "—his voice hardened—" the people comprising that house-party are not willing to give any help, even if they can. They are resenting our enquiries and are furious at the scandal, and they would go to any lengths, I believe, rather than have one of their number marched out with the handcuffs on." He laughed bitterly. "'That damned policeman' is how I heard one of them refer to me, and you should have seen their rage when, in common with the domestic staff, I made them all have their finger-prints taken."

Larose rubbed his hands together. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "and it will be a great pleasure for me to meet

them then."

"They know you're coming," said the inspector.
"Sir James has friends in the Home Office, and he told

me yesterday he had heard about you."

Larose looked disconcerted and frowned. "But it doesn't matter," he said after a moment, "and indeed, perhaps it is all the better. I can move quite openly among them then and they won't be challenging my right to be inquisitive." He spoke sharply. "I understand they are all remaining up there still?"

"And will continue to remain," nodded the inspector

decisively, "for a reasonable period of time. With some persuasion I induced Sir James to make them all agree to stay on until we have had longer to follow up our enquiries." He smiled grimly. "I practically forced them to that, for I had let them know pretty plainly that I was sure one among them was the guilty party, and I hinted, too, that if we didn't find out straight away who he or she was—then even if they all dispersed away to their homes, they would still be under police suspicion during all their lives, for someone would be always keeping an eye upon them, and they would never be quite unwatched people again."

"And they believed you?" smiled Larose.
"Perhaps not exactly," replied the inspector, and he smiled back, "but you may depend on it that that class have nearly all got plenty to hide in their lives and so probably they didn't altogether relish the idea that there was even a chance that I was speaking the truth."

"And did you find out anything about this captain," asked Larose; "anything I mean, that is not generally

known?"

"Nothing much," replied the inspector. "He was invalided out of the army early in nineteen-fifteen with an injury to his left arm and it appears that he never regained the full use of it. He could not raise it above a certain height, and when playing cards, for instance, had always to get someone to deal for him. He was a bachelor, well-to-do and very good-looking. A great one with the women and a gay man about town, I understand."

"Any of the maids up there good-looking?" asked Larose.

The inspector smiled. "None of them bad, but they're all quite out of the picture, I am sure, and you will realize that at once when I take you up. No probability of collusion either with anyone outside, as you suggest, for four of the girls have been up at the Court for more than six years, and only the fifth one is not an old servant. This latter is that Betty Yates who found

the body and she has been in service there for only just over a week."

"Oh!" exclaimed Larose quickly, "just over a week!"
But unimpeachable references," grinned the inspector "and her father's a policeman in Dalston."

Larose pretended to look solemn. "Suspicious," he

said, "and we shall have to look into it."

"She's twenty-two," went on the inspector, "and a spit-fire who answers back. Then there's the cookhousekeeper. She's middle-aged and grim, and she's served the Marleys for twenty years. Nothing doing there. Then—the butler, and I can't imagine him killing anyone. He's inclined to be secretive, certainly, and he pretends to be more stupid than he really is, but he's been in the family nearly as long as the cook, and I fancy he's taking his cue from his master and not saying too much. His name's Slim and he looks sly."

"And the chauffeur," asked Larose, "although he

wasn't sleeping in the house?"

"Twenty-six and recently married," replied the inspector. "Four years with Sir James and nothing suspicious there to me." He shook his head emphatically. "No, although I certainly didn't like that butler, you can take it from me, we can leave the servants out and concentrate upon those guests."

"But does it seem probable to you," asked Larose thoughtfully, "that any of them would commit a murder for money? Surely two thousand two hundred and fifty pounds would not be much to people in their positions?"

"Mr. Larose," said the inspector impressively, "you've a great reputation, I know; but I am a much older man than you and I've seen much more of life—especially society life—over here." He leant forward and touched the detective on the arm. "For five and twenty years I was stationed in the West End of London, and in my time I've handled hundreds of society swells such as these. Forgers, blackmailers, all manner of thieves among them and even those proved guilty on the capital charge. And all my experience tells me that

wealth and position are no safeguards from the sudden criminal urge." He spoke very solemnly. "None of them up there at the Court may have been absolutely in need of money, but, nevertheless, with the opportunity before them, on the spur of the moment, they may have let themselves go and plunged headlong into murder. Unexpectedly perhaps, one of them returning to the billiard-room that night found the captain in a doze they knew he had the money on him—sudden temptation seized them—they tried to rob him and he woke up. That poker was handy and—" he shrugged his shoulders -" the rest was so easy."
"Well," asked Larose slowly, "and did you pick out

any one of them in particular, who from his appearance or demeanour seems likely to you to have done it?"

The inspector shook his head. "I never judge society people by appearances," he replied sharply, "for with their habitual bowing and scraping to one another, they're always play-acting among themselves, and you don't see the real men and women underneath." He laughed disdainfully. "Why, in my time I've known men with the poise and saintliness of an archbishop who were card-sharpers and tricksters on the turf, and I've seen women with the faces of Madonnas who were notorious among the traffickers in white slaves."

"And it is the opinion of this house-party then," said Larose, "that none of their number committed the murder?"

The inspector smiled grimly. "They pretend it is," he replied, "and when I am questioning them privately they mask their faces to stony expressions as if the whole thing were a bore; but when I am talking to them altogether "-he lowered his voice significantly-" there is an anxious, furtive look about them as if they were afraid that any moment someone among them may make a slip and give himself away."

"Well," said Larose briskly, "now you've given me these general ideas, let me have some particulars about

them, one by one."

"Sir James Marley first, then," said the inspector, "and he's a gentleman. An aristocrat, courteous, but very reserved. Is undoubtedly of opinion that his class should rule the common people and he scoffs at the idea that any of his guests could commit a crime. Would be more light-hearted, however, I should think, if he were not under this cloud. Seventh baronet of the line. Thirty-four years of age. Major, late First Life Hussars. Served in the Great War. Mentioned twice in despatches. Married Sonia, daughter of the Rev. John Cator, Rector of Broome, near Ivybridge, Devonshire. Her ladyship"—he looked at the detective and the lines of his face softened—"a perfect little beauty. A really lovely girl and they've only been married six months. I'm dreadfully sorry she's mixed up in this."

He sighed and then, pulling some papers towards him,

picked up the top one.

"And now for this blessed house-party," he said grimly, "this flock of sheep with the wolf among them somewhere. First, there's a big, brawny Scot, the Honourable Donald Culloden of Taft Hall, somewhere up in Argyllshire, and outwardly—he's most respectable. He's stiff-necked and haughty, and a descendant of Scottish kings. He breeds prize oxen and stares at you like one of them himself. He's slow and heavy in his movements and very deliberate."

"What age?" asked Larose laconically.

"Elderly, about fifty-five, I should say. His expression is inscrutable and might conceal anything."

"Go on," said Larose, because the inspector

paused.

"Next," said the inspector frowning, "there is Gentry Wardle, K.C., one of them who's furious at being detained. He can be very insolent when he wants to, and he's got a long, hatchet face. He's generally sneering and making biting remarks. He speaks to me as if I'd done the murder and he were going to put on the black cap." The inspector swore softly. "Now, I should like to bring the murder home to him more than anyone,

I think. He's a bachelor, about forty, or perhaps a little more, and looks capable of doing anything."

"I've heard of him," said Larose. "He practices in the matrimonial courts."

"Well, he's nasty," said the inspector, "and he doesn't mind showing it. Neither does the next man," he added, "and he's Colonel Mead—Ransom Montgomery Mead. He's got a cousin a lord somewhere and is very stuck-up. Doesn't say much, but thinks a lot of himself. Great bridge player and owns racehorses. Has a place near Newmarket. Widower, about fifty. Rather stout and looks as if he were an ardent whisky drinker. Keeps his eye on the women a lot."

"That's no evidence of crime," smiled Larose. "I'm

interested in them myself."

"So am I," added the inspector heartily, "and no one more so, but what I mean is, he follows the maids about with his eyes too much. I saw him watching that Betty Yates once, but I must say the minx didn't encourage him."

"Go on," said Larose; "who's next?"

"Dr. Merryweather," said the inspector, "a quiet little man, who ignores me completely unless I am addressing him directly. He wears big tinted glasses generally and if he's got them on, you can't tell whether he's looking at you or not. He's a cool customer. Was a Harley Street specialist once, but made his pile quickly and retired. Has travelled all over the world and is an authority on the pedigree of horses. Talks a lot about wines, too, and said the other night at dinner that he'd hang any man who spoke while he was tasting vintage port."

"And all this information," asked Larose, smiling,

"where did you get it from?"

"From the maids," replied the inspector, looking for the first time as if he were well pleased with himself. "They were pools of water in an otherwise arid desert and I reckon I drank them dry." He looked down at his notes. "Now for the last man, and I can't quite

sum him up. Clark Rainey the actor, another one with lordly relations. A nephew of Lord Hunton, a darling with the women and dresses like a screen star. Changes his clothes half a dozen times a day. About thirty, and sometimes earns a thousand pounds a week, I'm told. Smiles sarcastically at me and looks all the time as if he were amused. A big better, I understand, and as daring as the devil."

"And do none of them feel horror for the tragedy that

has taken place?" asked Larose.

The inspector smiled. "Well, if they do," he said dryly, "they're too well bred to show it. They are accustomed to hide their feelings, I tell you, and going about among them as I have been, you'd never dream a ghastly murder had occurred in the very house." He shrugged his shoulders. "At any rate, that is the attitude they adopt when I am up there-annoyance and resentment only that they are being detained. Sir James and his lady alone show any real signs of stress and I suppose that is simply because what has happened has taken place under their roof."

He turned to his papers again. "And now for the women—and, whilst I hold to my opinion that any one among them may have done the murder, I am willing to agree that the money motive may perhaps have to be modified here. Jealousy and revenge may now turn out to be the urge, and I'll take one of the most likely

parties first.

"Lady Sylvia Drews, widow of Sir Chester Drews, the shipowner. No children and lives in Park Street, Mayfair, and reported to be very well-to-do. Very handsome woman, but can't tell her age, for she's fighting the years. Might be thirty-five, might be fifty. Was known to be very interested in the deceased; probably, therefore, angling for another husband, and perhaps the captain having encouraged her and then given her cause for jealousy, she may have struck him down in a moment of passion, just taking the notes afterwards to put us on a wrong scent. She's undoubtedly a passionate woman

and one who looks capable of anything." He shook his head. "She doesn't suggest innocence in any direction to me."

"Did you make any search, by the by, for those

notes?" asked Larose, suppressing a smile.

The inspector made a grimace. "In the servants' quarters of course," he replied, "for we police are always expected to go for the servants." He threw out his hands. "But what was the good of attempting to search a large building like the Court? We weren't likely to find the money if we had pulled down the whole house, and even if we had, it would certainly have been planted somewhere which would have given us no idea as to who had committed the murder. Remember—whoever took it had had all night to arrange a hiding-place."

He looked down again upon his papers. "But now for woman number two—the wife of the Honourable Culloden, and like almost everybody else up there she's descended from somebody wonderful. A McCocken of the McCockens, whoever they may be, and her blood is as blue as blazes. But she seems a peculiar party to me and she may easily have been in an asylum some time, by the look of her. She's got big, prominent eyes, very fixed and staring, and the servants have been gossiping a lot about her. Her talk is all about Fate and Destiny and she interprets dreams and picks winners by the number of tea-leaves in her cup. Yes, she's a queer woman and I wouldn't put it past her that she's not always been quite right." His face broke suddenly into a pleasant smile. "You see, Mr. Larose, I'm telling you all these things exactly as they strike me, for any moment the most trivial observation may direct you upon some trail that may turn out to be a highly profitable one to follow."

"Quite so," agreed Larose readily. "I am very interested. Go on."

"Well, then, next we come to Miss Felicia Brand," said the inspector, "and she's a Society journalist and as bold as brass." He frowned angrily. "She had the

darned cheek to be taking notes yesterday when I was questioning some of the others and then she started to cross-examine me and ask me how long I'd been in the Force, and if I were married and things like that." He looked thoughtful. "She's not bad-looking and may be anything between thirty and thirty-five. She's a hefty wench, too, with big, strong arms, and if she'd made an assignation with the captain in the billiard-room that night and he'd got a bit fresh, she may easily have swung that poker too hard in teaching him manners."

"But they would hardly have arranged to meet in the billiard-room, would they," asked Larose gently, "with the chance of someone coming down, as you mentioned,

for a drink?"

"No, perhaps not," agreed the inspector after a moment, "but then you never know. The night was chilly and the billiard-room was the only place where there was a fire, and women nowadays are a daring lot."

"Go on," said Larose smilingly. "There are only

four left now. Who's next?"

"Alice Heybridge," replied the inspector promptly, the lawn-tennis star. Twenty-eight—I saw her age in the newspapers the other day. A fine, well-built girl, and she, too, could have hit as hard as any man with that poker." He nodded. "Now she's a possibility, certainly. She was unusually interested in us all the time, and we caught her watching everything through the window when we were taking these photographs of the dead man. Yes, we can't leave her out, for I don't think somehow that it's her nature to be curious about things in an ordinary way and yet—she was very, very curious about what we were doing that morning, most suspiciously so."

He smoothed the wrinkles out of his forehead and

went on:

"And now we have three pretty girls, Society butterflies to all appearances, and yet one of them may easily turn out to be a wasp. Ethel Winchester, with a bishop for her father, Rosemary Wainwright, daughter of Sir

Julius Wainwright, the ironmaster, and Lucy Bartholomew, the orphan heiress of Bartholomew's Pale Ales. They are all under twenty-five and everything about them is expensive and attractive." He leant back in his chair. "Now, Mr. Larose, I have no particular reason to suspect any of these three young girls and yet in the peculiar circumstances all the experience of life compels me to suspend judgment about them until we have definitely located the guilty party elsewhere."

"You are casting your net pretty wide, aren't you?"

asked Larose doubtfully.

"I am a policeman," replied the inspector sternly, "and that is what I'm here for. I suspect everyone, and with this class of idle and over-fed people with nothing to do but consider their own pleasures, I tell you the raw, elemental passions of life lie only just beneath the surface." He shrugged his shoulders. "If this crime were one of jealousy, then any of these women or girls may have done it."

The detective made no comment and gathering his

papers together the inspector went on:

"Well, Mr. Larose, that's all, and I have given you a hard problem to solve. A savage, ruthless crime among surroundings of great luxury; twenty-one persons with a murderer or murderess among them; no tracks or trails to follow "—he smiled grimly—" and about forty-eight hours to do the trick, for we can't expect to keep them much longer than that."

"And the billiard-room——" began Larose.

"Exactly as we found it," replied the inspector, "except, of course, that the body is not there. And also the captain's bedroom," he added. "Both sealed and locked and I have the keys."

"And the finger-prints," asked Larose, "you found

plenty in the billiard-room, of course?"

"Nearly everyone's," nodded the inspector, "in

some place or other."

"Well," said Larose, "I think we'd better go up then at once." He thought for a moment. "But I should

like to see the police-surgeon first. I suppose he did

the post-mortem?"

"Yes," the inspector said, "and he's a very good man." He took out his watch. "And we may catch him straight away if we're quick, for he's generally at home at this time."

"One moment," said Larose. "Any likelihood, do you think, that this was going to be another of those

burglaries?"

"No likelihood at all," replied the inspector quickly, "and there was nothing in any way to suggest an attempted burglary. Besides, there were no points in common with the crime here and the other troubles. There—we always saw how they had effected an entry and the entries had always been forcible." He shook his head emphatically. "No, unless one of the servants at the Court was acting in collusion with a third party outside, which, as I have told you, I think highly improbable—then we needn't look farther than from among those guests for the murderer. I am sure of it."

There was a knock upon the door and a constable

entered.

"A letter for Mr. Larose," he said, regarding the detective with respectful interest; "just come by service

car, from the city."

With a puzzled frown the detective took the letter from him. It was addressed: "Mr. Gilbert Larose, Police Station, Eastbourne," and marked "Urgent" in the corner.

"Excuse me for a minute," said the inspector; "I've a little matter to attend to, and then I'll drive you up in my car." And with a nod to the detective he followed

the retreating constable from the room.

Hesitating just a moment, Larose opened the envelope, to find a short letter with an enclosure accompanying it and, glancing down quickly, he perceived the letter was signed "Thomas Yates, P.C., Dalston.",

His face broke into a smile.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF DEATH

ABOUT eleven-thirty that same morning a number of those people whose dispositions and temperaments the inspector of the Eastbourne police and Gilbert Larose had been so energetically discussing, were gathered together upon one of the lawns of Southdown Court, and interestedly regarding the coming of a storm that was sweeping down towards the town from over Beachy Head.

The air about the Court was close and sultry and not a breath of wind was stirring among the trees, but as far as the eye could see, great black clouds were banking themselves up over the downs and, with every few seconds, the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled.

The peals were getting louder.

"It will be over us in less than three minutes," remarked an immaculately dressed man carelessly, "and

then for a good downpour."

"Well, anything for a breeze, Mr. Wardle," yawned a handsome woman with deeply carmined lips. "I've had a wretched headache ever since I got up this morning.

I feel a hundred to-day."

"And you look tired, my dear Sylvia," exclaimed another woman, tall and angular and with big prominent blue eyes. "I thought so at breakfast directly I saw you." She sighed and swept round a plaintive glance upon the others. "But then who wouldn't be tired with all we are going through?"

A tall, aristocratic-looking man, with a clear-cut profile,

smiled wearily.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Culloden," he said. "I assure you it was not included in the hospitality I was intending to offer you, but "-he shrugged his shoulders and laughed a little bitterly-" it is Fate, as you would say."

"Oh, I know it isn't your fault, Sir James," exclaimed Mrs. Culloden quickly, "and it's worse, of course, for you than anyone; still "-and she sighed

again-" it's very distressing, isn't it?"

"Very," agreed Sir James Marley grimly, "for all of us." "And are you sure, Sir James," asked a pretty girl with widely opened eyes, "that this dreadful Gilbert

Larose will be coming to-day?"

"I am sure of nothing, Miss Bartholomew," replied the baronet gravely. "I know no more about it than you do. All I was told was that he was going to be sent down."

"Well, he'll not be much good, anyhow, if he does come," scoffed Gentry Wardle. "He's much over-rated in my opinion and he's been lucky in his cases, that's all. I heard him giving evidence once and wasn't at all im-

pressed. He's a most ordinary-looking fellow."

"But he's psychic, Mr. Wardle," protested Mrs. Culloden with great animation, "and that's of course why he's being sent here." Her voice quavered. "That horrid policeman is so certain it was one of us who did it, and they must expect this Larose will find out something at once." She lowered her voice mysteriously. "He's supposed to be elemental you know, and in touch with strange forces that ordinary people don't understand."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Gentry Wardle sarcastically, but how useful he would have been then if we had

only had him at Goodwood with us the other day."

"They say," went on Mrs. Culloden as if she had not heard the interruption, "that when a murder has been committed, no matter how long afterwards, he can still see the shadow of the murderer upon the wall."

"And you believe it?" asked a stout, red-faced man,

scornfully.

"It is not impossible, Colonel Mead," replied Mrs. Culloden with spirit, and she nodded her head vigorously.

"A great many things happen in this world that you never hear of in the army." Her face flushed in her enthusiasm. "Why, they call Gilbert Larose the man who never fails.' He's——"

"But if they had to send down somebody," interrupted Lady Sylvia Drews rudely, "it ought to have been Naughton Jones. He's a freak to look at and very rude, but he got back Bishop Rundle's silver snuff-boxes when the regular police had failed hopelessly. Everyone says he saved his lordship from a severe nervous breakdown."

"Oh, how black it's getting!" exclaimed Lucy Bartholomew. "It'll soon be dark as night. Here comes the storm." And with the falling of big drops of rain everyone hurried into the house and stood in the

big open doorway.

A blinding flash of lightning tore through the sky and then an awe-inspiring peal of thunder crashed overhead.

"We're right under it now," drawled Gentry Wardle with a bored expression. He smiled dryly. "We're

being specially favoured."

"Then there's a reason for it," called out Mrs. Culloden shrilly, raising her voice in order that it should be heard above the lashing of the rain which was now beginning to fall in torrents. "It's a day of judgment" -she looked round with suddenly startled eyes-" the hour of judgment, perhaps-upon someone in this house."

The men looked either bored or contemptuous, but a visible shudder ran through some of the women and then a voice from the background called out angrily:

"Stop it, Flora, at once will you? Your confounded nonsense will upset the ladies. Have the door shut, will you, Marley, and then, perhaps, my wife will hold her tongue?"

But before Sir James had time to make any comment

or give the order, a roar was heard in the direction of the lodge and three seconds later a car was seen avalanching round the bend of the drive. It was being driven furiously as if its driver were in great haste to gain whatever shelter were possible against the side of the house.

"It's the policeman's car," snapped Gentry Wardle

grimly, "and that fellow Roberts is driving it."

"And the man sitting with him," added Mrs. Culloden

excitedly, "is Gilbert Larose. I am sure of it."

The car was braked sharply to a standstill in front of the house, and Inspector Roberts, followed closely by Larose, darted across to the doorway and stepped into the hall. Instinctively, a lane was made for them to pass through, and Sir James Marley came forward.

"Mr. Gilbert Larose," announced Inspector Roberts curtly, indicating his companion, and taking notice only

of the baronet.

Sir James bowed coldly. "Come this way, will you?" he said, and he at once made for a small room leading out of the hall. He held the door open for them to enter, and then, following them in, closed it behind him.

"Sit down, please," he went on and then, with no further speech, he himself took a chair and proceeded silently to regard his visitors, as if he were in no way particularly interested as to what the nature of their

mission was.

"Exactly," was the mental note of Larose, "a gentleman, as the inspector said, but he's stiff and haughty and he's suffering a lot. Friend Roberts had not been too tactful, and he's put his back up, otherwise I should have had no difficulty in dealing with him. He's not a fool and he'll be quite straightforward."

The inspector cleared his throat and spoke in a cold,

official tone.

"We are not satisfied, as I have told you, Sir James," he said, "and Mr. Larose has come to help us in the investigation. It is my firm conviction, as you are aware, that the crime was committed by someone in the

house, and that our enquiries will end as they began here."

"Quite so, Mr. Roberts," replied the baronet care-lessly, "I understand." He looked coldly at the detective. "And what do you propose to do, Mr.

Larose? How are you going to begin?"

Larose smiled pleasantly. "Oh, I just want to look about a bit, sir, and then ask a few questions." He put as much sympathy as he could into his voice. "I won't worry any of you more than I can help, for I realize, of course, what a dreadful time you must be going through."

"Very dreadful," commented the baronet, "and the memory of it will overshadow all our lives." He spoke very quietly. "We shall probably never, any of us,

be quite the same men and women again."

"But you would wish, wouldn't you," asked Larose gently, "that the culprit should be found out, whoever he or she may be?"

"Most certainly," agreed Sir James looking Larose straight in the face, "as you say-whoever he or she

may be."

"And you have no suspicion of anyone, of course?"

"None whatever," was the instant reply, "and it is inconceivable to my mind that any of my guests could have done it." The note of antagonism in his voice deepened. "I disagree entirely with Inspector Roberts there." His lips curled scornfully. "None of my friends, that I know of, are short of two thousand pounds."

"But is it quite clear that robbery was the motive?"

asked Larose quietly.

Sir James elevated his eyebrows. "Is anything clear, Mr. Larose?" he replied. He shrugged his shoulders. "But as the money is missing, and no other motive is conceivable, surely we can surmise that?"

Larose started on a new tack. "And are you well acquainted with all your guests?" he asked. "Have

you known them all for some time?"

Sir James hesitated. "The men, yes," he replied slowly, "the young ladies, no. My wife became friendly with them only since our marriage—five months ago."

"And Captain Dane," asked Larose, "he was an old

friend?"

The baronet inclined his head. "My superior officer in the war. I served under him in nineteen-fourteenfifteen."

"And was he known to all the other guests before he came here?"

Sir James spoke very deliberately. "No, on the contrary," he replied, "only to Colonel Mead, but they had known each other for many years."

"He was a stranger then to everyone else when he

arrived?" went on Larose.

"Exactly; even to my wife," replied the baronet, and he added sarcastically, "so there was no likelihood of his having any desperate enemy here thirsting for his blood." He stirred irritably in his chair. "As it happened it was quite by chance that he came to be our guest for the Goodwood week. I met him accidentally at Henley last month and gave him the invitation then."

Larose thought for a moment. "And the servants,"

he asked, "you are sure of them?"

Sir James's face cleared. "As far as I can be sure of anyone," he replied. "My butler has served our family for many years, and the maids "-he half-smiled-" well, surely the murder was not a woman's work."

"And your opinion then is," said the detective, "that the murderer was a stranger who came from outside?"

"Most certainly," replied Sir James. He looked coldly at the inspector. "There have been a number of burglaries in Eastbourne lately, as of course Mr. Roberts has informed you, and undoubtedly an entrance was effected here."

"And if the murderer did come from outside," asked the detective, whose eyes had never once left the baronet's face, "you have no suggestion to make as to how he got

into the house?"

"There are many possibilities," replied Sir James slowly, "and for one thing I am not satisfied he did not get in through one of the windows in the corridor upstairs. There are several places where an active man could have climbed up, and it is not impossible that in so doing he left no traces behind. Also I have stressed to Mr. Roberts the other possibility of someone having slipped into the house earlier in the evening before the doors were locked and the burglar alarms set."

"But in either of those happenings," suggested Larose diffidently, "having committed the murder and being in possession of the banknotes, surely the murderer would have made away from the house in the easiest way possible. There was only that side-door in the billiardroom to open and he would have been out in the grounds at once. And yet the door there, I understand, was found both bolted and locked." He shrugged his shoulders. "And then what were the chances of any stranger escaping the attention of those Alsatian dogs?"

Sir James made no comment and the detective went on softly. "Then another thing-why should a burglar have gone into the billiard-room at all? Was there anything there of particular value, of a portable nature, that he could carry away?"

A long silence followed and then Sir James shook his head slowly. "No, nothing that I know of," he replied. He sighed wearily. "But I tell you I don't pretend to understand it at all and I'm sick of going over all the possibilities. It's a dreadful nightmare to me."

Larose rose briskly to his feet. "Well, I think that is all, just now," he said, "and so, with your permission, I'll start at once to go over the house and then "-he spoke as if he were asking a great favour-" I'll have a

chat with your guests as well as with the servants."

" Just as you like," said the baronet quietly and, rising to his feet, he moved across to the door and opened it for them to pass out. "Oh! one moment, Mr. Larose," he added, and pushing to the door again, he stood hesitating with his hand upon the handle. "You

might "-he was obviously trying hard to speak care-lessly, but there was a tremor in his voice-" you might, please, if you will, deal gently with the ladies, and particularly so with my wife, because "-he had himself completely under control now-" because we are hoping for an heir to the baronetcy in about six months."

Larose drew in his breath sharply and in spite of all the hardening influence of his life's work amongst crime, a lump came into his throat. No wonder the man was

suffering, no wonder he looked drawn and ill!

"Certainly, Sir James," he replied gently. "I'm not an enemy in any way, and it may not be necessary to question her ladyship at all."

"Thank you," said Sir James stiffly and, opening the door again, he followed after his visitors into the hall.

Larose had gone first and for the moment he thought the hall was untenanted. Then he saw a girl arranging some flowers in a vase upon a small table near the big fire-place, and he realized instantly that she must be the mistress of the house.

Obviously still in the very early twenties, she was extraordinarily pretty and, built rather on the small side, there was something, notwithstanding the dignity of her carriage, very childlike about her. The lines of her face were almost perfect in their symmetry and the ivory pallor of her complexion was heightened in its effect by a head of rich dark hair. She held herself erect and proudly.

"Poor little woman," sighed the detective, "and she's mixed up in all this wretched business when her thoughts

should be all upon the coming of her baby."

The girl had looked round sharply as they had turned into the hall, and her glance wandered from the inspector and her husband; she fastened a pair of beautiful dark eyes upon Larose.

It was evidently the intention of Sir James to pass without noticing her, but she was standing directly in his way and so, after a moment's hesitation, he stopped

and with a frown indicated Larose.

"Mr. Gilbert Larose, Sonia," he said grimly. "He's

come to help. Mr. Larose—Lady Marley."

The girl stood hesitating, and with her lips slightly parted, regarded the detective with a cold, unfriendly stare, but then, seeing only gentleness and amiability in the eyes that were regarding her with equal intentness, the hostility in her face died away and, with a rather wistful little smile, she suddenly held out her hand.

"Your coming is naturally an ordeal, Mr. Larose," she said gently, "and it prolongs our distress." Her voice shook a little. "We hope, however, you will not find any of us quite as wicked as Inspector Roberts

believes we are."

"I hope not, too," smiled back Larose. "I've come with an open mind."

"And what are you going to do now, then?" she asked with a slight catch in her voice.

"Oh, I'm just going to look round first," replied Larose, "and then perhaps ask some of you a few questions."

"You'll want to question us all together?" she

suggested quickly.

"No, no," replied Larose, shaking his head, "nothing like that. I don't want anything so formal." He smiled engagingly. "Just a little chat, perhaps, with a few of you when Inspector Roberts has shown me over the house and I have spoken to the servants."

"But it will take you quite a long time, won't it,"

asked the girl, "even to do that?"

"Well, anyhow, I'll be as quick as I can," replied the detective non-committally, "and we'll upset your domestic arrangements as little as possible."

Lady Marley was now quite at her ease. "And you'll have some refreshment later, of course, won't you?"

she said, inclining her head.

"That's a good idea," exclaimed the detective, "and I can get to know your guests much better that way." He looked up at the big hall clock. "Now, what time do you have luncheon?"

The girl flashed an embarrassed look at her husband, but she composed her features at once and replied with no hesitation.

"At one o'clock, and we shall be pleased to have you." She turned with a smile to the inspector. "And

you'll join us too, Mr. Roberts?"

But the inspector was grim and unsmiling. "I'm sorry, my lady," he replied, "but my duties won't permit me. I have to get back as soon as possible. I'm just going to put Mr. Larose in the way of things and then I'll leave him." He looked significantly at the detective. "We'd better begin at once."

"Well, I won't detain you," said Lady Marley with a gracious little bow, "and I'll send for Mr. Larose when

lunch is ready."

"But that was not necessary, Sonia," frowned Sir James when he was alone with his wife. "You shouldn't have asked him."

His wife drew in a deep breath. "I couldn't help it, Jim," she replied brokenly. "He practically asked himself and besides "-her face lost a little of its careworn expression—"he seems kind and gentle, and it'll be

best for everyone if we keep friendly with him."

"Well, I'm damned," growled the inspector as he and Larose together were traversing the long corridor leading to the billiard-room, "but you've got a cheek. She never intended to invite you to have lunch with them. All she meant perhaps was a glass of beer in some back room."

"But I'm hungry," smiled Larose, looking amused, "and shall be ready for a good meal. They're sure to

keep a good cook here, too."

And why the devil didn't he tell me about that baby coming?" went on the inspector irritably. "I had a long conversation with him and he never mentioned it."

But Larose was saved from the necessity of replying, for by then they had reached the door of the billiardroom and the inspector was busy examining the sealed tape stretched across the jamb.

"All right," he exclaimed, "quite intact." And pulling it off, he produced a key from his pocket, and unlocking

the door, ushered his companion in.

"Now, Mr. Larose," he went on in a sharp, policemanlike tone, "except that the body has been removed, you will see everything exactly as we found it. The chairs and settees are in the same positions and the bloodstains are absolutely untouched. The poker has been handled, of course, but it has been put back to the place where it came from and none of the ashes in the grate even have been disturbed. Of course, as we expected, we found finger-prints everywhere on surfaces wherever they could be left, but they did nothing to help us, for everybody, almost, had been here at some time or other on the night of the murder." He made a grimace. "The place smells musty because it's been shut up, but this is a modern house and with the doors and windows well fitting there is practically no dust. Now, I'll pull up the blinds and you'll get the hang of everything."

Larose found himself in a large oblong room containing two full-sized billiard tables, with long, dark, leather-covered settees on either side, and with half a dozen or so of big arm-chairs conveniently placed. It had a parquet floor upon which were laid a generous number of rich Persian rugs. At the far end was a large open fire-place, and drawn up close to it was one of the arm-chairs. There was a second door to the room in an alcove at the side. Upon the walls were a dozen or so of sporting pictures, a couple of mounted heads of leopards, a collection of spears and shields, some old-fashioned-looking rifles with peculiar barrels, and clusters of evil-shaped, foreign-looking daggers and knives.

"His uncle, the former baronet, General Sir Julian Marley," explained the inspector, pointing to the varied trophies on the walls, "served in India and collected these things." He nodded his head contemptuously.

"A waste of good money to my mind."

He walked over to one of the settees and pointed to some stains upon the leather.

"This is where he was killed," he said in a low voice, "and as I have told you, we can be quite certain of several things. He was on his feet facing the murderer when he was struck—he must have been for he was struck full face on his forehead, and there were those marks of blood down his clothes and upon one of his shoes. Then he fell backwards on to that settee, he lay balanced there for a few seconds and then, from that trail of blood, he slipped off on to the floor and died. And you heard what our police-surgeon said—that the attack must have been so swift and unexpected that he could not even have had time to put up his hands, for if he had there would have been some marks of injury upon them probably, and certainly some soiling from the black-lead of the poker, upon his fingers or his palms."
He pointed to the fire-place. "All the queer old fireirons there are covered thickly with black-lead, and there were distinct traces of it, as you heard, upon the wound in the forehead."

"But the little cut on his ear," commented Larose thoughtfully, "that wants some explanation. Remember—your surgeon couldn't account for it although he said it was bleeding at the moment when the captain died, and he was sure, too, it was much too insignificant an injury to have been caused by that heavy

poker."

"The bigger puzzle to me," said the inspector slowly, and as if he were busy on his own train of thought, "is how does it come about that it was here by the settee that he was killed? Was he dozing in that arm-chair when someone attempted to rob him and, waking up suddenly, did he dart these twenty-odd feet away in an endeavour to escape the poker his assailant was threatening him with? That's what I think, and yet in some ways"—he shook his head—"all the facts don't fit in. If he saw the danger coming, why didn't he cry out? The acoustic properties of the room are good, and we have proved by experiment that a cry from here can be heard a long way through the house. Why, too, was

he killed facing his attacker, and why, again, did not he make some attempt to ward off the blow?"

It was quite a long moment before Larose spoke.

"I can give no answer off-hand," he said slowly. He measured the distance between the settee and the fire-place with his eye and went on. "But certainly the captain would not have been lying down here before he was attacked, for if he had been feeling chilly, as he had told them, of all places he would not have been upon this

settee, so far away from the fire."

"Quite so," commented the inspector dryly. He looked sceptical. "But of course if we don't believe that he was remaining on here before the fire that night because he was feeling chilly—then we surely need not bother our heads about why he was killed on this settee. He may have made an assignation with one of the females of the house, and they just happened to park themselves in this particular place."

"And the lady had first gone over to the fire-place," laughed Larose, "and provided herself with a poker to add zest to the love-making." He shook his head and became serious again. "Ah! but I must have time in this room to work out all it can tell me, and I'll have to arrange with Sir James to come here to-night when they're all in bed. I shall get the right atmosphere then

with everything silent in the house."

"And you'll be stopping here at the Court, then?" suggested the inspector ironically. "You'll join the

house-party perhaps, in place of the deceased?"

"That's it," nodded Larose cheerfully, "and then I'll soon find out who among them is acting as if he'd got some secret to hide." He looked solemnly at the inspector. "Yes, if anyone in this house committed the murder, he surely cannot be so inured to crime that he can be continually masking his feelings, and show no signs of the effort he is making." The detective's tone was most emphatic. "He is an amateur, this assassin, and in close contact with him, I shall catch him, in a hundred little ways, betraying himself."

"Hum!" remarked the inspector, "but I don't seem to remember hearing Sir James or her ladyship suggest

that you should stay on here as a guest."

"No," replied Larose airily, "but I shall have to manage it." He looked round thoughtfully, and took in all the surroundings of the room. "Door locked, windows bolted, burglar-alarms undisturbed and poker, the instrument of death. Yes, yes, this certainly looks

an inside job and a crime of the moment."

He walked over to the door in the alcove and unlocked it, noticing that the key turned easily and with hardly any sound. "But if the murderer were anyone belonging to the house," he remarked very puzzled, "it is funny that he didn't unlock the door and leave it open so that it might have been thought afterwards the killer came from outside."

"That's one of my points," said the inspector quickly, "for, as I say, he was one of the crowd staying here, and not a regular professional, and after he had grabbed the notes he was too flurried to think of laying any false trails. He just thought of nothing but getting away

quickly from the scene of his crime."

"That might perhaps have been the case," commented Larose slowly, "if he had been a man with no nerve or self-possession, but if he had had the foresight, as we have seen, to throw that poker into the fire in order to obliterate his finger-prints, then surely one would think he would have thought to unlock the door and leave it open."

"Bah!" exclaimed the inspector scornfully, "they never think of everything, these gentry. They always make a mistake somewhere."

The detective, after a final long and searching look

round the room, took out his watch.

"Well now, sir," he said briskly, "I've seen all I want to here for the present and so I'd like a quick look over the house, just to note the positions of all the rooms, and you can tell me where everyone slept. Then we'll go into the captain's room and see if there's

anything particularly interesting there. We've only three quarters of an hour before lunch."

They pulled down the blinds and, out in the passage

again, the inspector relocked the door.

"What about re-sealing?" he asked.

"Hardly necessary, I think," replied Larose. "The lock's a good one and you say this is the only key there is, besides after to-night we may be able to let them have the room back."

The Court was of two stories only and covered a large area, but their progress was speedy, and soon they were

upon the upper floor.

"Any burglar-alarms here?" asked Larose.

"No," replied the inspector, "but all the rooms except two were occupied that night, and we found the windows of these two vacant ones bolted, and with the safety-catches down. Besides"—and he shook his head—"there happen to be flower-beds beneath both of them and no ladder could have been placed against the wall without leaving unmistakable traces of its having been there." He led the way along a wide passage. "Now here's that corridor Sir James spoke about, and there are flower-beds under these windows too."

Larose leant out of one of the windows he indicated. "About twenty-two feet," he commented, "from the sill to the ground and there's a water-pipe there." He smiled. "Still, it would take a very acrobatic man to swing from it on to the window as Sir James wanted to suggest." He shook his head. "No, I think we can rule out all entrance upon this floor and so if the doors and windows below were all undisturbed, we can take it for granted there was no forcible entry to the house at all. Now for the captain's room.

The inspector led the way to a door down the corridor and unlocking it, they were at once in the dead man's

room.

"We made a thorough search here for those banknotes," said the inspector, "although as I told you we didn't expect to find them. Still, on the chance that he might later have brought them up here, we looked for every possible hiding-place besides his trunk—carpet, wainscotting, boards, furniture, mattress—in fact we looked everywhere. The contents of his trunk have been replaced, as nearly as possible, as we found them, and nothing of any kind has been removed from the room. I locked it at once and the key has been with me ever since."

"No other key in existence?" asked Larose.
"Yes, a master key to all the doors," nodded the inspector, "but Sir James handed that over and I've got it now."

The trunk of the dead man was opened and the

detective ran rapidly through its contents.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, opening a fair-sized tin, "he has travelled, undoubtedly. Quite a little medicinechest. Iodine, mustard leaves, chlorodyne, and a twoounce bottle of quinine." He turned quickly and, striding over to a shelf above the wash-stand basin, took down a tumbler and held it up to the light. Then he smelt it and finally rubbed his finger round the inside of the tumbler and put it lightly to his tongue.

He nodded quickly to the inspector. "It was the truth," he said, " when he told them he was feeling chilly, for he'd been taking quinine dissolved in some spirit, probably in some of that whisky there from that flask, and if we enquire into his life, we shall almost certainly find, from the amount of quinine he was in the habit of carrying about with him, that he has lived in a malarial

district at some time."

"Good!" exclaimed the inspector, but he looked rather disappointed. "Still he may have had a date with some female in that billiard-room all the same."

They went carefully through the contents of the trunk, but the detective found nothing further of any particular interest to him, and then he turned to a writing-table in the corner.

"Find any letters about?" he asked the inspector, and when the latter had replied in the negative, he

pointed to the blotting-pad and added: "But he's been writing some. One," he corrected himself, bringing the pad up to the window, "and as he apparently did not possess a fountain-pen, we may presume it was not his custom to write much. Therefore, whenever he did write, we may presume again, it was necessary and in a degree more or less important."

He held the pad up before the mirror over the wash-

stand basin.

"Quite a short one," he went on, "and evidently written to a friend, for he finishes up with 'Yours ever.' He frowned and beckoned the inspector over to his side. "Now, what are those words above? 'I'—something—'pleasant'—something—'tell'—something, and then a space for three or four more words."

"Think it of any importance?" asked the inspector, when for a long minute they had been studying the pad.

"But note the bold handwriting," continued Larose. "He was a man of energy, a man of enterprise—remember his eyebrows, Inspector—and you'll always find energy with bushy eyebrows. Oh, is it of any importance?" The detective thought for a moment and drew in a long breath. "Well, it might be," he said slowly, looking intently at his companion. "You see," he went on, "I am entirely in accord with you now that the murder was an inside one, and that you have certainly had speech with the murderer, but"—he frowned and shook his head—"we must not rest absolutely sure that the money motive is the only one, and we must grope about on the chance of finding something else as well." He tore off the sheet of blotting-paper, and folding it carefully, placed it in his pocket. "So, I am going to think this over."

A sound of softly pealing bells came up from the hall,

and the detective started.

"But that's for lunch," he exclaimed quickly, "and I mustn't keep them waiting "—he sighed whimsically—"the star guest, and—I am hoping to get one of them hanged."

CHAPTER IV

THE HANGMAN AT THE FEAST

ILBERT LAROSE was enjoying his lunch, for the turbot and lobster sauce were excellent, and the hock was the best he had ever tasted.

"The turbot, the sole and the salmon," was his mental comment, "are surely the very aristocracy of the sea, but I think I like the turbot best. It has a silky flavour that is most agreeable to the palate And this wine—it is a nectar, and most certainly much better than that beer the inspector spoke about."

He made a grimace. "But really, I wish I were enjoyingeverything under pleasanter surroundings. This is quite a little banquet in its way and the company is most select, but "—he sighed—"I am the hangman at the feast."

He went on: "Yes, Gilbert, my boy, you are out on business, and it is your hope to introduce one of these fine ladies or gentlemen to the seven-foot drop later, and, as they are all quite aware of that fact, you are not popular in consequence. No one loves you, and wherever you turn your eyes you are met with nasty looks. That red-lipped party opposite, the handsome Lady Drews, is regarding you as if you had just come out of the zoo, and all the men appear to be cold and contemptuous. They are not accustomed to taking meals with policemen, and they don't like it accordingly. If you are right, however, one of them ought to be feeling decidedly uncomfortable at the present moment, although, for the life of you, you don't see any signs of it."

He sighed again. "No, Gilbert, you've got no friends here; you're—" His face brightened suddenly. "Ah! but you may be mistaken. Her pretty little ladyship has given you two nice smiles, and that smart-looking parlourmaid—you'd swear she's that policeman's daughter, Betty Yates—appears to be quite sympathetic when she glances in your direction, which she very often does."

The meal was not a lively one, for what conversation there was was carried on in subdued and more or less gloomy, complaining tones. Mr. Culloden grumbled about the bad prospects for the grouse season; Gentry Wardle was annoyed that there was nothing of interest in the newspapers; and Lucy Bartholomew had many

grievances, and one in particular—the weather.

No one entered into any conversation with the detective, yet never at any time, he noticed, were their glances long away from his direction and any quick movement on his part, he saw, focused all eyes upon him at once.

But he was quite unperturbed, and enjoyed his lamb and mint sauce with the same zest with which he had

appreciated the turbot.

"No good hurrying, Gilbert," he told himself complacently. "All in good time, and in five minutes or so, when you're not feeling quite so peckish, you'll join in the talking yourself. This feed, as I have already told you, is business as well as pleasure, and before you get up from this comfortable chair you must have wangled an invitation, somehow, to stay on for a few days here at this very agreeable hotel." He smiled to himself. "I told the inspector I was sure they would keep a good cook."

He sipped his wine appreciatively. "But now, which among these men strikes you as likely to be the guilty party? You regret to say, not one of them as yet, for no one appears to have got the wind up in any way. Sir James is just irritable and annoyed and shamed with the scandal of everything; the Honourable Culloden, as the inspector says, is a pompous ass; that K.C. fellow is

waiting to be insulting to you the first chance he gets; the actor chap is watching to see if he can derive any amusement from your table manners; the colonel has no expression at all upon his face, and the doctor does not seem to be interested in you in any serious way. As for the women, they seem harmless, although the Culloden one has been staring hard and for so long that you really might believe she's trying to hypnotize you."

His thoughts ran on. "Then, there's the butler—the poetically-minded butler, who told Betty Yates you were the 'Angel of Death'-and you appear to be only just another one to wait on to him, but you notice he's got a keen, sharp face, and the well-shaped hands of a man who should excel in something in life. Yes, you look forward to a little talk with him."

The detective glanced up and caught Lady Marley's eye. She gave him another gracious little smile, and then asked immediately: "And how do you like England,

Mr. Larose?"

"Oh, it's a lovely country," he replied—he pretended to shiver—"but how I miss the sun." He looked round smilingly upon the company, as if he were on the best of terms with them all. "You see, in Australia we get so much sun, and always, winter and summer, in some parts of the Commonwealth, the sun is shining all day long. In summer everywhere we get the sun for months and months on end. Always then sunshine and blue skies, and when the heat is a dry heat there cannot be a more delightful climate in the world. It's an invigorating heat, a sort of champagne of the air."

No one made any comment, but everyone stared as if they were most surprised he should have had the temerity to make his reply to Lady Marley longer than a monosyllable. He appeared quite at his ease, too, and not a

bit awed by their frowning looks.

He went on enthusiastically: "Yes, and the sea is so deliciously warm that in the summer-time you can be in bathers for the whole day, and bathing parties carry on until midnight and even later."

Lady Sylvia Drews looked at him scornfully through her lorgnette. "But it's a dreadful country, Australia," she remarked, elevating her eyebrows. "I have always heard so."

"Dreadful only," smiled Larose, "because it is so

dreadfully far from here."

"But most of the people are blacks, I understand," she went on.

"Blacks!" ejaculated Larose, as if he were puzzled.
"Oh, you mean our politicians." He laughed merrily.
"Well, perhaps some of them are pretty black, but they are not all as black as they are painted."

"And the country is full of snakes," frowned Lady

Drews.

"And you might live all your life in Australia," laughed Larose, "and never see one. Of course, there are plenty of snakes, but they don't hang about where people are, and they are quite as frightened of us as we are of them, and get away as quickly as possible. Only about four people in the Commonwealth die each year from snake-bite, and so "—he bowed smilingly to her— "so the danger of snakes need hardly deter you from paying us a visit."

"And what are the most dangerous kinds of snakes you have there?" asked Lady Marley quickly, as if intending to forestall the rude reply that Lady Drews, from the contemptuous expression upon her face, was

about to make.

"Oh, the death-adder and the tiger-snake, every time," replied Larose promptly, "and their bites are very deadly. One person in every two bitten by them dies and there is practically no hope at all if you are bitten on the body."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Lady Marley, shuddering. "And have you ever killed any of those snakes, Mr.

Larose?"

"I killed a tiger-snake once," replied Larose, smiling, "actually in the middle of a game of tennis, but it was very unusual that it should have been anywhere near. Something had frightened it, and it glided right out across the court."

"But you've killed other things besides snakes," said Lady Drews dryly. "It's well known that you've shot scores of people"—she turned up her nose disdainfully—"in your investigations."

"No, no," laughed Larose; "that's a libel." He suddenly became serious. "But mine is a dangerous calling at times, your ladyship, and "—he shrugged his

shoulders—" I have to protect myself."

"Then you admit you have shot people in Australia?"

insisted Lady Drews.

"But there are still more than six millions left alive there," parried Larose, "so I haven't been too ready with my gun, if it be, as you say, a little failing of mine."

"And do you then carry a pistol here?" asked Felicia Brand with great interest. "You've got one in your

pocket now?"

For the moment the detective looked embarrassed, but he quickly recalled his ready smile.

"Habit, Miss Brand," he laughed, "only habit-just

as some people carry a fountain-pen."

"But surely, sir, it is most questionable taste and unpardonable on your part," commented Gentry Wardle, elevating his eyebrows as if greatly surprised, "for you, as a guest here, to come to the table—armed?"

Larose went hot in his annoyance. "I am not an ordinary guest, Mr. Wardle," he replied. "I am

here——"

"Yes, yes, of course," exclaimed Gentry Wardle quickly, "I was forgetting that." He looked insolently at the detective. "I remember, as a young man, when travelling through Mexico, I had a meal with some niggers once, and——"

"Have you ever been shot yourself, Mr. Larose?" interrupted Sir James Marley, speaking quickly and with the evident intention of cutting short what Gentry

Wardle had been intending to say.

The anger that had been flaring up in the detective's

eyes instantly died down. "Yes, three times, Sir James," he replied. "It's give or take sometimes in my work"—he smiled—"and I'm not the only one who uses a gun."

A moment's silence followed and then Mrs. Culloden, fixing him with her big prominent eyes, asked solemnly:

"And what have you come here for, sir? What is

your intention with regard to us?"

"That's it," snapped Gentry Wardle angrily. "It's an insolence your being here at this table, and we insist—"

"Wait, please, Wardle," interrupted Sir James sharply, and he frowned sternly at the K.C. "We'll come to that presently." He signed to the butler. "Put on the decanters, Slim, and then you can leave us."

Everyone stopped speaking, and a hush came over the room. The faces of the women flushed uneasily, and the men regarded the detective with most unfriendly looks.

The butler and the maids left the room and the door

was closed behind them.

"Now for it," thought Larose, "I'm the poor fox, and it's 'up dogs and at him!"

Then Gentry Wardle, with a venomous gleam in his

eyes, rapped out angrily:

"Yes, we want to know now what are this "—his lips curled to a sneer—"this gentleman's intentions. What does it mean his thrusting his presence upon us like this? Are we to have no privacy at all? It's an insolence, I say. It's a—"

But a clear, musical voice came sharply from the end of the table. "Mr. Larose is my guest, Mr. Wardle," exclaimed Lady Marley with spirit, "and I would beg

to remind you of that."

The big K.C.'s jaw dropped and he looked taken aback.

"Er—er, certainly, Lady Marley," he replied, and he turned at once to the detective. "Pleased to have you here, I am sure, Mr. Larose." He smiled sarcastically. "What are the newest things in handcuffs now?"

The detective laughed. "I'll tell you later, Mr. Wardle," he said—his voice hardened—"perhaps in a few hours."

"But I think we ought to be informed, Sir James," broke in Clark Rainey, "to some extent how we stand and exactly what this gentleman's presence here means."

"Certainly, you are entitled to know," replied the baronet coldly, "and I have no doubt Mr. Larose will be only too willing to tell you." There was just a trace of annoyance in his tone. "It was his wish to meet you all like this at lunch." He turned to the detective. "You might kindly let us know now specifically what you want."

Larose took off the gloves at once. The studied

insolence of the men had stung him to annoyance.

"I am an emissary of the law," he said sharply, "and one of you now present here "—he corrected himself—" or elsewhere in this house—is guilty of murder, and it is my conviction that I can best satisfy myself as to the guilt or innocence of each one of you, by a personal contact with him or her for a few hours." He spoke dispassionately. "There were twenty-two persons under this roof last Tuesday night; one of them was murdered and from what we have found out, we are of opinion that the responsibility for his death lies among the remaining twenty-one. For twenty of you, therefore, my presence here is undeserved, but it will only be a temporary annoyance at worst, and the more facilities you give me for my enquiries—the sooner you will be rid of me for good."

"You are very sure, aren't you?" sneered Gentry Wardle rudely. "You have made up your mind beforehand then, that one of us here has done it, and that no

one came in from outside?"

"A closed and sealed house before the murder," replied Larose sternly, "and a closed and sealed house after." He looked challengingly round the table. "It is undoubtedly distasteful to you to realize it, ladies and gentlemen, but—one among you is a murderer."

"Fiddlesticks," scoffed Wardle. "The police are incompetent, and to cover their stupidity, you have been sent down to level a general accusation against everyone. You haven't a scrap of evidence that the murderer came from inside the house."

"We haven't a scrap of evidence that he came from outside," replied Larose, "and therefore until we learn something to the contrary, we must take the more evident supposition to be the correct one." He glanced round the table again. "But if you will all help me as best you

can," he hesitated a moment, "and not-"

"Help you!" burst out Gentry Wardle, "do you think then we shall try and hinder you?" He thumped his fist upon the table. "Do you imagine then there is a conspiracy between Sir James and Lady Marley, and all the rest of us here, to screen the murderer of Captain Dane?"

"Not at all," replied Larose quickly, but you are naturally upset at the knowledge of the dreadful suspicion with which the public as well as the police regard this house-party and in consequence—"

"The public!" gasped Gentry Wardle, and he could hardly get his breath, "the public suspect us! Why,

you---'

- "Pass the port, will you please, Mr. Wardle," interrupted Lady Marley sharply, "you are neglecting Mrs. Culloden," and when with an apologetic bow, Gentry Wardle complied with her request, she turned to the detective.
- "And to come down to something we shall all understand, Mr. Larose," she said quietly, "what do you want to do?"

"Stay here for a day or two," replied Larose promptly, have the run of the house and just be allowed to go wherever I wish.

"Certainly," replied Lady Marley promptly, "and you will be doing us a service, I am sure. Consider yourself as our guest as long as you wish. Tea at four-thirty in the lounge, dinner at half-past seven and "—she looked

round calmly-" everyone will give you all the help

they can."

The ladies rose from their seats and left the room and Sir James turned at once to the detective. "Pray, don't let us keep you, Mr. Larose," he said. He bowed ironically. "As my wife has just told you, everything in the house is yours."

Larose gave a nod that might have meant anything,

and immediately followed the ladies.

Then Gentry Wardle said frowningly: "I am sorry I was rude, Marley, but I don't like that fellow. His impertinence is colossal and it was a mistake, I think, for your wife to give him permission to stay."

Sir James blew a wreath of smoke from his cigarette.

"It was entirely your fault, Wardle," he replied slowly. "You should not have made the dead set on him that you did, and so obliged her to take his part. You forgot

he was a guest at our table."

"Well, I don't like the man, anyhow," returned Wardle, "and if he finds out nothing, I'm sure he'll still stretch any point to bring a scandal upon us." He looked sharply at the baronet. "We ought to have got a private detective here on our own." He turned suddenly to the other men. "Now what do you say to us asking Naughton Jones to come down. He's the finest private detective in the world. I know him slightly and," he glanced back at Marley, "you don't mind, do you?" Sir James looked bored. "My opinion is," he replied

quietly, "that no one will catch Dane's murderer now.

He's had too long a start."

"Oh, but do let us engage Naughton Jones!" exclaimed Clark Rainey eagerly. "Jones is a jealous old bird, and will put this Larose in his place, pretty quickly. We can all go shares in the expense."

"Just as you like," said Sir James carelessly. "You

can please yourselves."

But a few minutes later when the baronet was alone with his wife it was evident that he was not as unconcerned as he had wanted to make out.

"Wardle's telephoning for Naughton Jones now," he said with a frown, "and it's all because of the fuss you made of Gilbert Larose." He shook his head reprovingly. "You were foolish again, Sonia, for you should not have been so lavish with your invitation to the man. It was quite unnecessary."

Lady Marley looked frightened, and very different from

the queenly young chatelaine of the Court, at lunch.

"But if he's got to be here, Jim," she replied brokenly,
we may just as well make ourselves as agreeable as possible; besides"—and her spirit began to reassert itself—"I could not sit still and allow Mr. Wardle to be so

insulting to our guest at our own table."

"We shall be having two of the best detectives in the kingdom here, now," said her husband gloomily, "and if they light upon anything "—he sighed deeply—" what a scandal upon our house!" His face softened and he drew his wife tenderly towards him. "Poor little girl, it's a terrible ordeal for you."

"But Mr. Larose may perhaps see where someone could have broken into the house," said the girl eagerly,

and then——"

Her husband shook his head. "No chance, Sonia. Build no hopes, for a child, almost, could be certain that he was killed by someone amongst us here. A child even—"

But the girl placed her hand over his mouth. "Don't please, dear," she said with a sob, "I can't bear it. I try to keep a smiling face before them all, but with you—" She put up her arms and pulled his head down. "Oh, kiss me, please, Jim! Everything is so dreadful."

CHAPTER V

THE SUSPICIONS OF LAROSE

once set about questioning the occupants of the Court, and he dealt with the domestics first.

"I'll let the high and mighty lot cool down a bit before I tackle them," he told himself, "and besides, it's more than probable I shall pick up the first line to start upon from one of the servants."

His first interview was with the butler, and at his request the interview took place in the latter's bedroom.

"No chance of our being interrupted here, Mr. Slim," he remarked, "and also "—he smiled—"I shall be able to determine in some way what sort of man you are by talking to you among your own surroundings."

The butler was of medium height and build, with a sallow complexion and rather small, deep-set eyes. He had a straight, pointed nose with a large mouth and tightly closed, thin lips. His hair was straight and very black, and well plastered off his forehead. He looked young for his age and his demeanour was quiet and respectful.

Larose sat down on the edge of the bed and motioned

him to the one solitary chair.

"Sit down, Mr. Slim," he said, "and then our little

talk will not be quite so formal."

The butler did as he was requested and a moment's silence followed. Then the detective rapped out:

"Ever been in prison, Mr. Slim?"

The butler's mouth opened and his face assumed a pasty colour. "No, no," went on Larose, "don't get upset. I'm only asking you a question. So you haven't?" He smiled. "Well, don't worry, there's plenty of time yet. You're only forty-four, I've been told, and I knew a man once who didn't hit the jug until he was over seventy." He eyed him very solemnly. "Now, are you hard up? Have you got any money?"
The butler glared. "Yes, plenty," he replied sharply.

"I'm not hard up."
"Lucky man!" exclaimed the detective. "Then where have you got your money?"
"In the savings bank."

"Show me your book."

The man looked astounded and for the moment it seemed as if he were going to refuse but then, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he unlocked a cupboard and a box and finally handed a well-thumbed savings bank book to the detective."

"Hum!" said Larose. "Three hundred and fortyseven pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence, and very nice too." He ran his finger down the page. "Now, where did you get the forty-five pounds from—deposited June fifteenth?"

The butler was scowling. "I won it at the races,"

he replied sullenly, "I went to Sandown Park."

"What horse then did you win it on?" asked Larose.

"Several," replied the butler curtly.

"Tell me one," persisted Larose.

For just an appreciable moment the man hesitated.

"Queen of Night," he replied, looking very angry.
"Oh!" commented the detective, "and where did that four pounds ten shillings come from on April first, and another four pounds ten shillings on June twentyeighth? It looks like rent to me, paid in just after quarter days." He turned back the pages of the book. "You have recently bought property then?"

The butler was fidgeting with his feet. "No," he replied emphatically, "I don't own any property.

They're just chance amounts that I happened to put in."

Larose regarded the book thoughtfully, and then after a few seconds, handed it back. "How long have you been with the Marley family?" he said.

"Nineteen to twenty years." "You carry your age well."

"That's no crime," was the reply, and the butler's manner was no longer deferential.

"You're single, I understand?" went on the detec-

"I haven't got any," answered the butler, "nor any brothers or sisters," he added, "nor any relations at all."

Larose looked at him sharply. "Nor any friends?" he suggested with possibly just a trace of irony in his tone.

The butler shook his head. "No particular ones." His voice was very surly. "I just keep myself to myself,

and I mind my own business, too."

"And what are you interested in Art Treasures of the World for?" asked Larose pointing to a shelf. "I notice there's a book up there with that title." He rose to his feet and reached for the book he indicated. "'A Handbook for Collectors'" he remarked, reading the sub-title. "Ah! and quite an up-to-date edition too! Then you are a student of art as well as a butler?"

"I picked it up cheap, second-hand," replied the butler quickly. "I am interested in a great many things

and read a lot."

"And this Every Man his own Lawyer," asked the detective, handling another book—" you are interested in law too?"

"A little," replied the butler carelessly. "I picked that up second-hand at the same time." He seemed suddenly then about to lose his temper, for he added defiantly: "And what's that to do with you?"

But Larose had apparently not heard him, and for a few seconds in a pre-occupied sort of way he turned over the pages of the book he was holding in his hand. Then

suddenly he put it back upon the shelf and turned again to the butler.

"And now, Mr. Slim," he asked briskly, "what about the murder of Captain Dane? What do you make of it?" And at once it seemed to him that the butler looked relieved and his face brightened.

"I don't make anything of it," he replied.

beyond guessing."

"But surely you have formed some idea?" said Larose.

"No, I haven't," was the reply, "I've formed none at all."

Larose raised his hand. "Now look here, Mr. Slim," he said very solemnly. "Perhaps of all here in this house, you, more than anyone, are under the suspicion of the police. You are the only manservant, you have the control of the fastening of the doors and windows, and you knew that the captain had two thousand two hundred and fifty pounds in notes in his possession. Therefore—

"I didn't know he had got two thousand two hundred and fifty pounds," interrupted the butler sharply. knew he had won something, but I didn't know how much."

Larose shook his head. "Think again, Mr. Slim. You did know for you told the girls in the servants' hall you had heard the gentlemen in the billiard-room talk of the captain having won over two thousand pounds; besides "-and he smiled with great good-humour-"a man with a nose like yours observes and listens to everything. Why-when you took my hat from me in the hall before lunch—you looked at the band inside to see where I'd bought it from, and I'll swear you could tell me every stone in the rings Mrs. Culloden was wearing at lunch. I saw you looking at them several times. No, no, Mr. Slim, you're an observant and "I'm not a murderer," said the butler stiffly.

"I don't necessarily think you are," replied Larose,

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"but I do think, as I have said, that you are quite intelligent and will therefore realize that it is best for you to help me all you can." He eyed him very sternly. "Now looking back to the night of the murder"—he spoke very slowly and deliberately—" can you recall any single incident out of the ordinary, one single thing that you can now link up with the dreadful tragedy that followed?"

"What do you mean?" asked the butler stonily.

"Was there any unpleasantness between the captain

and any of the other guests?"

"None that I am aware of," was the reply; "besides"—and for the first time the butler seemed to have an opinion of his own—" Captain Dane was killed for that money."

"Oh!" commented Larose. "You are sure of it?" And when the butler gave no answer, he went on: "Then you believe the murderer came from outside the

house?"

The butler avoided his eyes. "I suppose so," he replied slowly. "That's what everyone here thinks."

"And how did he get in then," asked Larose quietly, "if you saw to it that all the doors and windows were fastened that night, and they were found in the same condition the next morning?"

The man looked up at the ceiling. "I have no idea,"

he replied.

"And what about those dogs then?" asked Larose. "Would they let a stranger cross over the grounds and give no sign? They didn't see him with the moon almost at its full that night?"

The butler's face was expressionless. "I know nothing about it," he replied. "I've already told you

so and it's no good you questioning me."

"But those dogs," persisted Larose, taking no notice of the butler's obvious irritation, "are they savage? Would they let you, for instance, pass unchallenged at night?"

Some animation at last came into the butler's face. "I shouldn't care to try it," he replied grimly. "They

are not too good tempered at any time, and they have to be muzzled before they are turned loose at night. But they are big, heavy animals," he added, "and if they were attacking anyone, I think it would always be possible that their muzzles might come off."

Larose was silent for a moment, and then he spoke

very quietly.

"You're not being straightforward, Mr. Slim, and my opinion is that you are as assured as I am that someone here did the murder "—he shook his head—" but for some reason you are withholding from me any ideas you might be able to express." He rose quickly to his feet. "Well, I understand your things have been searched already," he added, and when the butler nodded scornfully, he walked over to the wardrobe: "Still I'll just have a quick run through myself if only as a matter of form."

He opened the wardrobe and one by one proceeded to examine the articles of clothing inside, holding each garment up to the light and giving it a rapid scrutiny. The butler sat on in his chair, and watched him con-

temptuously.

"You are a methodical man," commented the detective, "and very tidy. You take care of your things. Hullo! I see you've got two overcoats. More than I have. I can hardly afford one." He stood meditatively regarding an overcoat of a dark grey colour. "Now, this would almost fit me. We are about the same build."

"There are no blood-stains on it," said the butler coldly, "if that's what you're looking for. I shouldn't

wear an overcoat in the house."

The detective seemed amused and, having finished his inspection of the wardrobe, turned to the chest of drawers.

"Everything in order here too. Shirts, singlets, pyjamas, pants," and he lifted the garments lightly and ran his hands over the paper lining the drawers. "Collars, ties and gloves," he ticked off as if he were making an inventory; "you shouldn't want for any-

thing at all." He suddenly picked out a pair of dark suède gloves from among the others and frowned. "Quite a dandy, Mr. Slim," he remarked after a long moment, "and yet you have remained single for all these years." And then, replacing the gloves thoughtfully, he closed the drawer and looked round the room.

"No, nothing more," he said slowly, "and now I think I'll see the cook. Oh, and you might, please," he added, "just ring up the police station and ask them to send along my portmanteau." He smiled at the man's obvious astonishment. "I shall be staying here for a few days."

"Very good, sir," replied the butler, recovering himself and becoming once again the obsequious attendant upon his master's guests. "I'll attend to it immediately."

Larose was very thoughtful going down the stairs.

"Hum!" he remarked to himself, "there are some very suspicious things about you, Mr. Slim, and you've told me several lies. You're not quite the innocent chap you want to make out, and it's my belief we shall find you're a bit of a crook."

Mrs. Salter, the cook-housekeeper, was interviewed

in her little sitting-room off the servant's hall.

She was tall and gaunt and rather swarthy-looking, and she fixed the detective with a pair of piercing dark

eyes.

Larose's eyebrows drew together. "Now, where have I seen you before?" he asked himself softly. "There's something familiar about your face and you certainly look older than the forty-six you told the inspector. You're a little bit frightened too." But he smiled pleasantly and said: "Just a little matter of form, Mrs. Salter, for if you knew anything of course you would have told Inspector Roberts at once."

"Yes," she replied, with her lips hardly moving, " of

course."

"And you have been with the Marley family a great number of years," asked the detective, "longer than Mr. Slim even?" "Yes," was the reply again.

"And you heard no noise that night, not a sound?"

"Not a sound."

"And it was a great shock to you the next morning when you were told of the murder?" He snapped out sharply: "Who told you?"

"Betty Yates, one of the parlourmaids. I was in the pantry." Her black eyes glinted sharply. "Yes, it was

a great shock."

The detective looked round and lowered his voice confidentially. "Now, you have five girls under you, I understand," he said. "Can you trust them?"

The housekeeper's eyes bored at him like gimlets. "What do you mean?" she asked sharply. "They

wouldn't murder anyone."

"No, no, not that," exclaimed the detective quickly. "But would any of them have a lover whom they would allow to come into the house?"

The woman looked scornful. "They have plenty of nights of liberty, and every opportunity of doing all they want to—outside," she replied. She snapped her lips together. "There would be no need for any nonsense

in here."

"Oh! I didn't mean that," replied the detective quickly and getting rather red, "but what are the men like they are keeping company with?"

"Quite respectable," replied the woman; "at least as far as I know." There was not a trace of humour in her tone. "One of them is a policeman in the town."

Larose repressed a smile. "And your maids are

quite reliable then?" he said.

"Four of them—quite," was the reply. "The fifth I know nothing about. She has only been here ten days, and her ladyship engaged her." She pursed up her lips disdainfully. "Plenty to say for herself, but then, that's only like all the girls of to-day."

"And Mr. Slim," asked the detective hesitatingly.

"Quite reliable and-"

"A perfect gentleman," broke in the housekeeper

with some heat, "and it was disgraceful the questions those policeman here asked him. A most respectable man and with money saved. I know everything about him."

"Oh! oh!" thought Larose. "You do, do you? "Well, in that case I shall have to bracket you both

together, and if one is fishy, then so is the other."

He smiled apologetically. "But we policemen," he said, "often have to put foolish questions just as a matter of duty, and because we're expected to. So you mustn't think too hard of us." He looked at his watch. "Now, I think I'll have a word with those girls and perhaps that Betty Yates had better come in first, as she was the one to find the body."

"Very good, sir," replied the cook. "I'll send her in to you at once." And for the second time during that interview the detective frowned as if he were puzzled.

A minute later the door opened to admit, as Larose was expecting, the maid he had singled out at lunch. She closed the door carefully behind her and advanced briskly into the room. She was alert and vivacious-looking, and she smiled brightly at the detective.

"Miss Yates," said Larose, smiling back, "the police-

man's daughter?"

"Yes, sir," she replied with a half-curtsy, "my

father's in the Force, stationed at Dalston."

"A smart officer," said Larose warmly, "and certain of early promotion. He sent me the letter you wrote him—by express this morning—which was most thoughtful."

The smile left the girl's face and she looked confused. "No, no," went on the detective quickly, "it's quite all right, and, of course, I shall treat everything you wrote as confidential. But sit down now, will you?"

The girl did as she was requested, making a brave

effort to recover her composure.

"Now, Miss Yates," said Larose, drawing his chair nearer to hers, "I expect great things of you, for you"—he lowered his voice solemnly—" of all the people

here, are probably the only one able and willing to help me."

The girl opened her eyes in surprise. "But how can I help you, sir?" Her face brightened. "I'm quite

willing, of course."

"In lots of ways," replied the detective quickly, "for although you've only been here ten days, I judge from your letter that you are a girl of thought and observation, and ten days with you will count more than ten months with some of the others." He laid his hand gently upon her arm. "Now I'm going to ask you a lot of questions, and I want you to think carefully before you reply, every time."

The girl flushed in pleasurable excitement and Larose went on, speaking slowly and with great deliberation.

"Now, when you found the body, tell me exactly what happened. I mean, tell me, action by action, exactly what took place to everyone in those first few moments of surprise. To start off with—you drew the curtains and pulled up the blind and then looking down saw the body and realized that the captain was dead."

"Yes," replied the girl; "I saw all the blood on his face, and that it was black and dry, and I knew too from

the way he was lying that it wasn't only a faint."

"And you ran out instantly to fetch Mr. Slim." The

detective frowned. "Why Mr. Slim?"

"Because he's a man," replied the girl promptly, and because "—she hesitated—"he is the most important of all the staff."

"More important than Mrs. Salter?" queried Larose. "I thought she was the housekeeper as well as the cook,

and was over all you girls?"

"Y-e-s," replied the parlourmaid slowly, "but then she always does what Mr. Slim says. He is the master in the servants' hall."

"Well, where did you find Mr. Slim?" asked Larose. "In his pantry. He was smoking a cigarette and Mrs. Salter had just brought him in a cup of tea and was putting it on the dresser."

"Well, what did you say?" asked Larose. "Exact words, please."

" 'Captain Dane's been murdered in the billiard-room. He's lying on the floor all covered over in blood!""

"And what did they say? What happened then?"

went on Larose sharply.

"Mr. Slim went white as a ghost and dropped his cigarette and Mrs. Salter looked awful. She clutched Mr. Slim's arm and gave a cry. She called out 'Oh, Will!' and I thought she was going to faint."
"Go on," said Larose. "Tell me exactly what

happened next."

Mr. Slim pushed Mrs. Salter away and ran into the hall. I ran after him and stood by the billiard-room door when he went in. He stood over the body for a moment, and I think just touched the face once, very quickly. Then he came rushing out and said: 'The master.' Then he raced upstairs and I heard him knocking on the master's door. Very quickly, then, it seemed, Sir James came running down, tying up his dressing-gown as he ran. They went into the billiardroom and I watched them. Sir James stared for a moment at the body and then said, as if he were choking: 'Is that door undone?' and Mr. Slim turned the handle of the door in the alcove and said: 'No.' Then Sir James said: 'Come out and lock the door at once.' Then he ran to the telephone and I heard him say 'Police.' "

"And what did Mr. Slim do?" asked Larose. He

spoke harshly. "It's very important."

"He stood in the hall where I was," replied the parlourmaid, "and he was blinking his eyes and biting his lips."

"Go on," said Larose.

"Then we heard voices on the landing above and three of the gentlemen came down the stairs, Mr. Wardle, Mr. Rainey and Dr. Merryweather. They were laughing, and some had got towels over their shoulders. They were going bathing. Sir James strode up and spoke to them, and they stood still like statues."

"What did he say?" asked Larose.

"I don't know. He spoke quietly. Then Mr. Wardle cried out: 'Good God!' and Dr. Merryweather said: 'The burglars.' Then Sir James asked Mr. Slim if the hall door was open and Mr. Slim said it hadn't been unlocked yet. He tried it. Then they all went round the windows to see if the house had been robbed, all except Sir James, and he went upstairs to break the news to the others."

"And you stood in the hall the whole time? Well, go

on."

"Then Sir James came down to the telephone again and rang up Mr. Binks at the lodge that the gates were not to be opened until the police came."

"What did he say?"

"He asked Mr. Binks if the gates had been unlocked yet, and then he told him on no account to unlock them until a car came up from the police station, and then be sure and lock them at once again. Then very quickly the police came and after one look in the billiard-room, Inspector Roberts rushed into the hall and ordered no one to leave the house until he gave them permission. Everyone looked awfully scared, but Dr. Merryweather at once asked if Captain Dane had been robbed, and he told the inspector that there had been over two thousand pounds upon him, in notes. Then the doors and windows all over the house were examined again and everyone was questioned."

"Who was questioned first?" asked Larose.

"We servants, of course," replied the girl scornfully, "and especially Mr. Slim, and our boxes were searched. From the way the inspector carried on, I believe at first that he even suspected me. Then the gentlemen all went into the library and from their faces when they came out, they'd been having an unpleasant time." She shrugged her shoulders. "Since then it always seems that there have always been detectives about the house somewhere."

"Well," said Larose slowly, "from what you tell me

you actually saw five people receive their first news of the murder." He ticked them off on his fingers. "Mr. Slim, Mrs. Salter, Mr. Wardle, Mr. Rainey and Dr. Merryweather," and when the parlourmaid nodded, he asked: "And to you they all seemed surprised?"

"Horrified," exclaimed the girl dramatically; "it was horror—much more than surprise. Of course," she added, "I didn't see the faces of the three gentlemen closely, for when Sir James spoke to them, they were some distance away from me, coming down the stairs."

"And you weren't watching them particularly,

probably?" asked Larose.

"No-o," replied the girl hesitatingly. "I was too dazed myself." She thought for a moment. "But I am sure their faces were white."

"And Mr. Slim?" persisted Larose.

"He was astonished like a man on the pictures."

"Ah!" exclaimed the detective. "Like a man on the pictures!" He spoke very quietly. "Now when you appeared at the pantry door that morning, if you had not spoken a word, would Mr. Slim have known where you had come from?"

The girl nodded her head. "Yes," she replied slowly, "because I had passed him in the hall a few moments before, as I was turning into the passage that leads into the billiard-room, and he knew it was my first duty to open the windows there."

The face of the detective was quite expressionless. "Well, when you saw Colonel Mead, later, how was he

taking it?"

"He was very shaky. I brought him two brandies before lunch. He hardly spoke a word to anyone all day."

"And Mr. Culloden?"

The girl seemed suddenly to remember something. "Oh, he was awfully worried and never seemed to want to leave his wife. He sat with her in the lounge all the morning, and walked with her in the grounds after lunch. I had no idea they were so fond of each other.

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He wouldn't let anyone talk to her. She was terribly upset."

"And the other ladies?" asked Larose.

"They were terrified the first day and even Lady Drews, who seems a hard woman to me, looked haunted, and as frightened as if she had done the murder herself. And Miss Heybridge and Miss Brand—and no one could call them sensitive—were all crumpled up." The girl's eyes brightened. "Her ladyship was the bravest of them all, although she and Sir James must be feeling it more than anyone. The master is such a proud man, and the scandal that has fallen upon the house is, of course, terrible."

Larose was silent for a few moments and then he

nodded his head smilingly.

"Well, I was right, Miss Betty," he said, "and you've given me an excellent word-picture of what happened on that morning of the murder. Now, I want to test your powers of observation much more." His voice was low and solemn. "I want you to think carefully and tell me in what way anyone has altered since that morning." He lifted his hand warningly. "Remember—someone here in this house is a murderer—we are certain there—and that one will have altered in some way. He or she will be very different now. Think. Perhaps more than one is involved, and fear, even terror, must be at the back of their minds. They know we are after them, and day and night, every moment, they must be watchful and upon their guards." He laid his hand again on her arm. "Now who here is different to what he or she was three days ago?"

The girl's face had paled and she stared at the detective

with frightened eyes.

"They are all different," she replied slowly. "They

have all altered in some ways."

Larose leant back in his chair and smiled. "Well, tell me the most trivial things that have struck you, little things that may seem of no importance but yet—may still help me in some way."

The parlourmaid thought hard. "They none of them

for one thing now seem quite so friendly with one another," she said. "They don't pair off together like they used to do. Mr. Wardle and Mr. Rainey used to be inseparable and Colonel Mead and Dr. Merryweather too, but now they sit about by themselves. Then at meal-times I often see Sir James looking round oddly at the other gentlemen, one after another, as if he were wondering about them." She nodded her head. "Yes, he's suspicious of someone, I am sure, for he's had his bed moved out of her ladyship's room into the dressingroom, so that he's nearer the landing now, and can hear anyone moving about in the house, and he's the last one to go to bed, too, at night." She smiled faintly. "That's one of the changes in the house and some others-Mrs. Salter and Mr. Slim whisper a lot together now, and Mr. Slim and Mr. Binks, he's the chauffeur, have quarrelled about something and are not on good terms with one another. Then nearly all the men drink more brandies and sodas than they used to, and Dr. Merryweather goes into the garage a lot and he never used to go there before. Mr. Binks says he is a regular nuisance poking about the cars."

"Go on," said the detective, for she had stopped

speaking; "it's all interesting to me."

"And the young ladies use more powder," went on the parlourmaid quickly, "and Lady Drews has stopped ' putting on her scent—she smelt beautifully before and everyone wears more jewellery now, as if they were afraid to leave the things in their rooms. Colonel Mead wears a ring with a very big diamond and the others have all taken notice of it. And the key of the diningroom door has got lost somewhere, and everyone writes more letters now, and they never go round in the garden to the billiard-room side of the house, and "-she sighed deeply, as if she were out of breath—" but those are all the things I can remember off-hand."

"And Mr. Slim and Mrs. Salter," said Larose musingly, "they are very friendly together and she calls him Will."

"Oh, no," replied the girl quickly, "not ordinarily. It's always 'Mr. Slim' again—but she did call him Will then."

"And you like Mr. Slim?" queried the detective.

"He's attentive to you girls?"

Miss Betty Yates cast down her eyes demurely. "He's most polite to me, and I do believe"—she hesitated—"sometimes he would like to make up to the other girls, but they've all got their own boy friends and so don't encourage him."

"But he doesn't look to me," said Larose thoughtfully, as if he would be much interested in the other sex.

He's cold and——"

"Oh, don't you make any mistake," interrupted the girl quickly; "he's just like all other men. Why—the very first night I arrived here he came home at supper-time—it had been his weekly day out—a bit fresh—he had had a few drinks, I am sure—and he kissed Alice, that's the girl under me, on the back of her neck. She pushed him away quick and lively and he was angry because she told him that he smelt of paint or something."

"Hum!" commented Larose and it seemed that for quite a long minute he was thinking hard. Then he said slowly: "So they all keep away from anywhere

near the billiard-room, do they?"

"Yes," replied the parlourmaid, "and Mrs. Culloden says it is haunted. She's quite recovered and talks a lot again. She's very morbid in her mind and I heard her ask Inspector Roberts, as a great favour, if she could have a look at the photographs which they had taken of the body, but of course he refused. Yes, she's a very peculiar lady."

"She seems very eccentric to me," said Larose.

"She's most absent-minded," went on Betty Yates,
and is always mislaying something. One morning when I came down I found one of her bedroom slippers in the hall "—the girl looked puzzled—" which was funny, because she had gone off early to bed the night before with a headache."

"Oh!" exclaimed the detective quickly, "and what morning was that?"

The parlourmaid smiled. "Before the murder," she

replied, "and I think it was last Monday."

"How did you know it was hers?" asked Larose.

"I didn't," said the girl, "but Elsie, one of the housemaids, recognized it and took it up to their room. Mrs. Culloden remembered nothing about it, but Mr. Culloden was very pleased and gave Elsie half a crown and told her not to talk about it, which of course she hasn't done except to me. He must be ashamed because his wife's so careless."

"Does Mrs. Culloden drink?" asked the detective

sharply.

"Good gracious, no," replied the parlourmaid.
"Why, she's on a diet and never drinks anything but water. She's not even allowed tea or coffee, because the doctors have told her they are bad for her nerves." Betty Yates nodded her head solemnly. "But she takes white pellets to make her sleep. Elsie's seen them and read the directions upon a bottle in her rooms."

"And about this money," asked Larose when he had taken a few moments to absorb the information which the girl had just given him, "you, of course, heard the captain say during dinner that he had actually got two thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds in banknotes

then, in his hip pocket."

"No, he didn't mention the exact sum," replied the girl quickly, "but what happened was this. They had been all talking about his luck at the races when Mrs. Culloden said suddenly: But surely you're not carrying all that money about with you now? and the captain laughed and patted his hip pocket: 'Safer,' he said, 'when all these burglars are about.'" Betty Yates screwed up her eyes. "But do you know, Mr. Larose, I somehow really don't think he was speaking the truth, for I was standing exactly opposite to him and saw him half wink at Mr. Rainey and then glance towards Mr. Slim and us girls." She lowered her voice impressively.

"I believe he only wanted to make out he'd got the money on him so that there should be no talk of such a

big sum being left in his room."
"Very interesting," said Larose thoughtfully, "very." He smiled and nodded his head. "And I was quite right when I said you were a very observant young lady."

There was a short silence this time, and then the detective stood up. "Well, thank you very much, Miss Yates," he said. "You've helped me a lot and now" he smiled his friendly smile—" you can help me still more." He lowered his voice. "I want you to keep your eyes and ears open and notice how everyone takes my presence here. You understand. If they look about to see when I'm coming and if they are different in any way when I'm near." He nodded his head and spoke almost in a whisper. "If they seem to you as if they are on their guard, I mean."

The girl nodded back and he was just about to open the door for her to pass out when he stopped suddenly and said: "But just one more question. Wasn't the

captain a great one with the ladies?"

"Oh, yes," replied the parlourmaid at once, "he'd flirt with anyone if they played up to him-from Lady Marley "-she hesitated and then smiled archly-" to poor, plain, uninteresting me." Her colour heightened and she tossed her head. "But I can take care of myself, I can, for I wasn't in Bishop Highbury's service for two years without learning something. There was always plenty of company there."

Larose smiled in amusement. "And this Captain

Dane was very fascinating, wasn't he?"
The girl nodded sadly. "And so good-looking," she replied, "you couldn't help liking him, And he had such nice manners too." Her face brightened. "Why when Sir James introduced him to her ladyship the afternoon he arrived, I happened to be in the hall, and he bowed then as if he were being introduced to the queen. It was like a piece on the stage."

"I understand," nodded Larose grimly, "and I

suppose then with these good looks and fine manners he

wasn't too popular with the men."

"No, of course not," replied the girl. "He could have cut them all out if he had wanted to. I am sure Lady Drews was falling head over heels in love with him, and Mr. Rainey was nothing to Miss Bartholomew when he was near."

"And you wrote your father," said Larose, "that the captain and Mr. Wardle were not friendly. What made

you write that?"

"I didn't say they weren't friendly," corrected the girl quickly, "but on Monday afternoon in the lounge, I do believe that for some reason Mr. Wardle was annoyed with him and that Mr. Rainey was, too, for they were both looking in the captain's direction and frowning. And Mr. Wardle said something about if it were him, he'd give someone short shrift."

"And what was the captain doing at that moment?"

asked Larose.

The girl laughed. "Talking as usual to some of the ladies, to Miss Bartholomew, Miss Winchester, Lady

Marley and I think Miss Wainwright too."

"Ah!" exclaimed the detective, "and they were jealous of course." A long silence followed and then he looked at his watch. "Well, I will have the other girls in now, if you will please ask Mrs. Salter to send them in, one by one. I've a lot to get through."

But the cross-examination of the other girls was very brief for the detective soon decided they had nothing to tell. They all impressed him as being of a good type, and he at once dismissed all ideas that they had any secret

about the murder to hide.

He rubbed his hands together, when the last of them had left the room. "Now, a nice medley of facts I've got to sort out," he muttered, "but it'll be hard if I don't pick up something from what Miss Betty has told me Jove! but I could suspect almost everyone." His face softened. "All except her ladyship perhaps, whose dainty hands could never have struck that blow. And

Sir James," he went on musingly, "and the Honourable Culloden too—I needn't worry about them." He shook his head suddenly. "No, I can't even leave out that Scotsman. He's prim and sanctimonious and one of the old school and if he had caught the captain philandering with one of those pretty girls, it is quite possible he might have got so enraged that he went for him after the petticoat had left the room." He shook his head again. "No, no, I can't really leave out anyone yet, not even perhaps as a matter of routine"—he grinned to himself "—my vivacious little colleague, Betty Yates. From all I have been hearing I shouldn't be at all surprised if the gallant captain hadn't tried on a kiss or two in that direction, and maybe if he was so fascinating, not without some measure of success. He rose briskly to his feet. "Well, now for that chauffeur at the lodge. It's quite possible he may hold the key to the mystery and if he's quarrelled with this butler chap, I'll have to find out why."

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CHAPTER VI

MORE SUSPICIONS

HE detective was walking thoughtfully through the lounge when Betty Yates who was arranging some tables there, sidled up quickly and put her

finger to her lips.

"Hush!" she whispered mysteriously. "Mr. Culloden's looking out for you. He's twice asked me where you were and he's waiting outside to catch you. The others are all in the garden round by the tennis court."

Larose nodded understandingly and proceeding through the hall door found the big Scotsman standing in the drive close near the house. The descendant of Scottish kings gave him a haughty glance and then turned his head away as if he were in no sense interested. A little disappointed, the detective was passing on when suddenly Mr. Culloden turned round again sharply and called out:

"One moment, Mr. Larose," and his face was very stern. "Please make no attempt to discuss this business with Mrs. Culloden. She knows nothing whatever about it and you will only distress her." He inclined his head stiffly. "Her nerves are very bad and Dr. Merryweather has said she must put the whole thing out of her mind."

"Very good, sir," replied Larose nodding, "but, as I understand Inspector Roberts has already talked with her, I don't suppose in any case it would have been

necessary." He spoke most politely. "I'll ask you a

few questions, instead."

"Oh! I know nothing about it either," said Mr. Culloden quickly. "I left him in the billiard-room that night and went straight up to bed and that was the last I saw of him. I was asleep in ten minutes and didn't wake again until Sir James knocked at my door in the morning."

"You are a sound sleeper, sir?" asked Larose.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Have been so all my

life. Nothing disturbs me."

"Then if someone were moving about close near you," asked the detective, "say even just outside your room, upon the landing, you would have heard nothing of it?"

The big Scot suddenly looked uneasy and he swallowed

before replying.

"I'm not dead when I'm asleep and any unusual noise would have wakened me at once." He frowned as if he were annoyed. "I mean, I sleep like a healthy man and that's how I slept that night."

"Do you bolt your door?" asked Larose.

"Always," was the instant reply. "That is—that is "—and Mr. Culloden pulled himself up quickly and again looked embarrassed—" when I am in a strange house and remember to do it."

"Did you bolt it that night?" asked Larose.

Mr. Culloden took a long time to reply. "I have no recollection," he said carelessly and his face was now as impassive as an ox. He suddenly glanced sharply at the detective. "But why do you ask me?"

"Oh, just a routine question," replied Larose with a smile. "We always ask that." He went on quickly: "But now, Mr. Culloden, was Captain Dane a likeable

mar ? "

"An officer and a gentleman," said Mr. Culloden shaply, "and could talk well and had travelled a lot. He was interesting to everyone."

"He was very handsome, I understand, and a great

favourite with the ladies!" said Larose.

Culloden jerked his head. "I really can't say, I had only known him three days." He smiled coldly. "I am not a woman, Mr. Larose, and do not pretend to be able to fathom the minds of the other sex."

"And you can suggest nothing?" said Larose.

"Nothing," replied the other and, taking out his cigar-case, with a curt bow, he turned and walked away.

"Ah!" sighed Larose as he followed him with his eyes, "another puzzle, for he too has got something to hide. He is undoubtedly afraid of me for some reason."

It was a beautiful afternoon and the fierce storm of the morning had all passed away. The sun was shining brightly but the heat was now tempered by a cool breeze.

Larose walked towards where he had been told the garage was when, turning round the corner of the house, he came suddenly upon a number of the house-party who were watching an animated single between Felicia Brand and Alice Heybridge upon the asphalt tennis court. Everyone turned to look at him and, as far as the spectators were concerned, all interest in the game appeared to cease at once. He was, however, passing by quite unconcerned when a sudden idea came to him and he stopped abruptly in front of Dr. Merryweather who

was sitting on a garden chair near Lady Marley.
"Can I speak to you for a moment, please Dr. Merryweather?" he asked, and the effect upon the doctor

was surprising.

The detective thought he looked positively frightened, for his eyes opened very wide, his face paled and the hand that was holding his glasses trembled.

"Only a few words," went on Larose apparently not noticing anything, and the doctor at once rose to his feet.

"Certainly," he replied huskily, "very pleased, I am sure," and he walked by the side of the detective for about fifty yards until they were out of ear-shot of the others.

"Let's sit down here," said Larose when they came to

a long wooden form close to the big doors of the garage. "I won't keep you long, but I thought as you were a doctor, I'd like to speak to you first."

"Quite all right," said Dr. Merryweather, and he spoke

with perfect calmness now.

He was a small, wiry man, slim and dark, with a keen, intellectual face and deep-set brown eyes. He was rather shy-looking but there was nothing weak about him and he suggested courage as well as great shrewdness. He had a humorous mouth and his expression was a kind one. He was very well dressed.

"This is a dreadful business, Doctor," began the detective, "and you will realize that my position here is not exactly an enviable one, in having to pick out an

assassin from among people of your class."

"Most unenviable, certainly," replied the doctor quietly, "and probably you will find, too, in the end, that all your time has been wasted."

"Wasted!" exclaimed Larose. "You think so?"

"I do," said the doctor, "for I know of no one here capable of killing anyone unless "-he smiled-" it be I myself." He nodded to the detective. "I've been in some tight places in the East, and like you am not too squeamish about taking life."

Larose smiled in return. "Well, I'll have to keep my

eye on you, sir," he said, "for my experience of criminals is that if they're not found out, they're very proud of

what they've done and have no regrets."
"Exactly!" commented the doctor readily. "My speciality was 'nerves' when I was in practice and from a life's study of psychology I quite agree with you. The hugging of a guilty secret has often its pleasurable side."

But about this murder," said Larose seriously, "I understand you were the only one of the guests here who went with Sir James to the inquest and I should like to have your opinion as an independent medical man as to whether you think from the evidence that transpired that there had been any struggle on the captain's part, I mean -whether he'd put up any fight."

The doctor shook his head. "I can't tell you," he said, "for the police were very reticent. The proceedings only lasted a few minutes and all the evidence tendered was quite formal and then the inquest was, as of course you are aware, adjourned."

"And you have formed no opinion," asked Larose, "as to at whose hands the captain met his death?"

The doctor was silent for a moment. "My opinion, for what it is worth," he replied slowly, "is that the murder was unintentional. Someone, a burglar undoubtedly, got into the house, came unexpectedly upon the captain and struck him down in a panic. Then he bolted back the same way he had come, without stealing anything." He nodded his head. "That's what I think, although, for the life of me, I can't see how the burglar got in."

Larose smiled sarcastically. "A little bit thin, isn't it, Doctor—with the house sealed and closed both before and after the murder? Now, if you consider—" But he suddenly stopped and looked intently at the doctor. "Why—why, I'm sure I've seen you somewhere before, Dr. Merryweather. I've an excellent memory for faces and yours has been haunting me ever since we were

introduced."

"I have never been in Australia," replied the doctor—

he smiled—" and I've never been in prison."

Larose appeared to be thinking deeply. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "I remember. Now didn't I see you at the races at Sandown Park? I was on duty there in the members' enclosure one day the month before last."

The doctor laughed. "You may have seen me. I go to most meetings. At what one were you present?"

"I don't remember the date," said Larose, "but it

was when Queen of Night won."

"Well, you might have seen me," said the doctor. He frowned suddenly as if he were very puzzled. "But you have an excellent memory for faces, Mr. Larose."

"Part of my stock-in-trade," laughed the detective. He pretended to sigh deeply. "But I shall always remember the day, for I had been told to back Queen of Night and forgot all about it until she had won. I might

have made a pot of money."

"You might have," said the doctor dryly, "but as there were only three runners, and she started at three to one on, you'd have had to make a big investment to win anything good."

"Well," said Larose, "I'd have had half a crown on, anyhow. Now, another question, Doctor. I understand you were not an old friend of the captain, but had

only known him for three days."

"That is so," replied Dr. Merryweather. "I had not

met him until he came here last week."

"And the other guests-had you met them before?"

"All except Miss Wainwright. She was the only one I did not know." The doctor regarded Larose with some amusement. "You see, I'm an old friend of the family, sir, and my respectability can be vouched for. I knew Sir James years ago when he was plain Mr. Marley, and her ladyship I have known since she was a very little girl. I have a property near her people who live in Devonshire, and as a matter of fact, I'm her godfather."

Larose regarded him intently. "And what about that night of the murder, Doctor," he asked, "I understand you were one of the last to see Captain Dane alive?"

The doctor nodded. "As far as we know," he replied, "Mr. Culloden, Mr. Rainey and I. We left him sitting before the fire."

"He was feeling chilly he told you?"

"Yes, and he was a chilly subject. He'd served four years in West Africa."

"And when you left him," asked Larose thoughtfully

"what lights were there on in the billiard-room."

The doctor gave him a quick look. "Only one," he replied, "the one over the side of the fire-place where he was sitting. At his express request I switched off all the others as we were going out of the door. I went out last."

"And you pulled the curtain there and shut the door?"

"No, I pulled the curtain but I didn't shut the door. It was unnecessary, for the curtain is thick and heavy, and reaches right to the floor. It would keep away all draughts. I just pulled the door to."

"And if anyone had come later to the door, would they have seen there was a light on in the room before

they pushed the door open?"

The doctor shook his head. "No, I am sure not. The door is in a recess as you must have seen, and until they pushed it open enough light would not filter through the curtain to show up in the passage."

A moment's silence followed, and then the detective

rose to his feet.

"Well, thank you, Doctor," he said, "that's all for the present. I may want to speak to you again later on."

The doctor smiled and made a low bow. "And the jury will now consider their verdict," he said as he moved away, "for I presume you have been all the time weighing up whether I'm the guilty party or not."

For a couple of minutes or so Larose sat on after he

had gone, and the detective was thinking hard.

"Now in what way is that chap mixed up in it?" he asked himself. "He's hiding something, I am sure. He's a cool, hard-bitten man of the world, and nothing would frighten him in the ordinary way, and yet—yet when I caught him unawares just now he was very upset. It might almost have been that he thought I was going to arrest him. Now what is it?"

In his concentration he was so still that it almost seemed he was holding his breath, and then suddenly his face cleared, and he chuckled quietly to himself.

"But it was clever the way I got that out of him, about Queen of Night, to find out if that butler chap was lying to me. Slim never won forty-five pounds, or any part of it on a horse that started at three to one on. He was lying heavily when he said that." He chuckled again. "And the doc gave me the information so

naturally on his own accord, that it will never occur to him to mention about it to anyone else."

But the detective would certainly not have been quite so pleased with himself if he could at that moment have

seen into the doctor's mind.

"Confound the fellow," ran the latter's thoughts, "but what does he think he knows, and why the devil did he want to make out he saw me at Sandown Park when the only day of the meeting I was not there was when Queen of Night won?" He shook his head. "But, by James, he startled me right enough."

Larose made his way into the garage, hoping to find the chauffeur there, but to his disappointment it was untenanted. He had a good look, however, at the cars there were eight of them—and was much impressed with

the values that they represented.

"Not one costing less than a thousand pounds!" was his comment. He screwed up his eyes. "But why has that doctor taken to pottering about here lately? There must be some reason and I'll have to find out. Now, to see if the chauffeur is at the lodge. I'll go there at once."

But it was destined the detective should be delayed again, for turning out of the garage he almost ran into Miss Felicia Brand who was coming in. She looked flushed, and was a little out of breath from her game,

but she accosted Larose at once.

"I want to speak to you," she said. "Don't come out, we can talk in here and then we shan't attract attention."

She was a fine, handsome woman of a rather masculine type. She was tall and of athletic build, and she did not look the age—thirty-five—that the inspector had given her. She had good chiselled features, a large mouth and rather cold blue eyes. She had plenty of assurance and she looked the detective up and down with a glance in which disdain and rather contemptuous amusement were blended. She sat down upon the running-board of one of the cars and producing a cigarette-case, held

it out to Larose, who with a word of thanks, helped himself to a big Egyptian cigarette.

"What do you want to tell me?" he asked when he

had lighted up and inhaled deeply.

"Tell you!" she scoffed. "Nothing." She smiled in dry amusement. "My hobby is journalism and you're good copy. I can get a fine article out of you."

The detective almost gasped at her impudence, and he sprang instantly from the running-board, opposite to

her, upon which he had taken a seat.

"No, no," he said sternly. "I'll not give you two seconds." He was really angry. "You ought to have more sense, Miss Brand. You're not a child, and murder is a dreadful thing." And he moved quickly towards the door.

"Oh! don't go, please, Mr. Larose," exclaimed Miss Brand at once dropping her disdainful air. "I was joking in what I said to you, for I have no intention of writing a line about the dreadful business. It would be an outrage upon my friendship for Sir James and Lady Marley. I don't forget I am their guest." She stretched out her hand. "Wait. I can help you if you listen to me." She made a grimace. "I'm not a child, as you say, and don't you be a fool. I've got eyes in my head and I've noticed things that should be of interest to you."

Larose hesitated. "I hardly think you understand the seriousness of this, Miss Brand. Murder is no——"

"Not understand the seriousness!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Why, we are sick with horror here—all of us—from the shame and scandal of it." Her eyes blazed. "Yes, sick with horror, Mr. Larose, although"—she lowered her voice suddenly and spoke very quietly—"we may not show it." She sneered scornfully. "I do not suppose you have mixed much with ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Larose, but I may tell you that in our class it is not customary to give way openly to our feelings." She bowed. "Breeding and traditions count for something after all, and there is hardly one of us here

whose father and forefathers have not served, and fought for their country."

The detective looked impressed, and resumed his seat

again.

"I understand," he said meekly, "but my father and his father before him both served the Crown, too, and were in many fights." He sighed. "They were policemen."

For a moment Miss Brand regarded him as if he were insulting her, then her face softened and she laughed

softly.

"A neat reproof, sir," she said, "and I deserved it." She bowed again. "I apologize, for I am sure from the moral courage you display in coming amongst us like this, that your forebears were in every way as worthy as ours." She raised her hand warningly. "But now I'm going to talk sense to you and the first thing—you needn't start suspecting Sammy Merryweather. He didn't want two thousand pounds. He's a very rich man and owns Starfinder, and I know for a fact that he refused fifteen thousand guineas for him after he won the Eclipse Stakes the other day."

"Money may have had nothing to do with the

murder," said Larose coldly.

"Of course not," agreed Miss Brand readily, but then—another thing. He was very friendly with Captain Dane."

"He had only known him three days," said the

detective dryly: "He has just told me so."

"Yes, but there were bonds of sympathy between them," replied Miss Brand sharply, "the strength of which no one could ever gauge by any measure of time, for, but for the doctor, Captain Dane would undoubtedly have been an invalid, all the rest of his life."

"Oh!" exclaimed Larose frowning, "the doctor told

me nothing about it just now."

"Perhaps not," was the reply, "but for all that, it is the truth, for it was through a discovery made by Dr. Merryweather that Captain Dane had been cured of a dreadful form of nerve trouble caused by his injuries received at the war." She spoke most impressively. "He had been subject to some kind of seizures, and everything came out incidentally the first night after dinner, and they were at once immensely interested in each other in consequence. It appears that Dr. Merryweather had introduced to the profession the injection of a certain snake-venom for the cure of these nerve seizures, and Captain Dane had been one of the first to be treated by it. Certainly, Dr. Merryweather personally had nothing to do with the captain, but he had heard all about his case from a brother nerve-specialist." Her lips curved scornfully. "So there could have been no possible cause of enmity between them, but on the contrary—a great sympathy and interest."

The detective nodded. "Quite understandable," he

said. He spoke carelessly. "And you yourself, Miss Brand, did you like the captain?"

She hesitated a moment and then looked Larose

straight in the face.

"Yes," she replied calmly, "for he was such a thoroughly bad man that you knew exactly what to expect of him." She shook her head slowly. "He was very fascinating and regarded every woman as his natural prey." She sighed. "He'd make up to any woman with any pretension to good looks, in any position, in any walk of life. It was an obsession with him—a disease." She laughed disdainfully. "But it was entertaining and amusing to a woman of my age."

"You seem to have summed him up pretty well," said the detective dryly, "after an acquaintanceship of only

three days."

"Oh! but I'd heard all about him," she exclaimed, "long before he came here. I've actually seen him several times, but it happens we have never been introduced. He's been living abroad though, for the last three years, in Italy "-she tossed her head-" and there were good reasons for it, too."

"What reasons?" asked Larose.

"He was mixed up in some scandal, a woman of course, and he'd have been a co-respondent if she hadn't died."

"And yet he was a friend of Sir James Marley,"

ejaculated Larose, "a man like that!"

Miss Brand was at once haughtily cold. "Sir James never listens to scandal and would never believe anything wrong of his friends, besides, Captain Dane saved his life once when they were together in France."

"What relatives had the captain?" asked Larose after a moment. "I don't seem to have heard he had

any."

"He had none living that I know of," was the reply, "but Dane was not his real name. He was Hector Bonning until about four years ago when his mother's brother died and left him a fortune. Under the provisions of the will then, he had to assume his dead uncle's name."

"A gallant gentleman!" commented Larose, "and it seems a pity that we must look for his murderer."

"But you must find him," exclaimed Miss Brand vehemently, "for as that policeman told us we are all besmirched until he is found." She looked through the garage doors to make sure they were alone. "Now, listen, Mr. Larose, and I'll tell you why I wanted to speak to you. I've noticed one or two things." She lowered her voice significantly. "That butler here, with all his twenty years' service in the Marley family does not impress me and I have an instinct that he is not an ordinary man. He's too inquisitive in a peculiar way, for one thing, and notices every bit of jewellery that we women wear, just as if he were appraising it and totalling up how much it would fetch if he could steal it. I've watched him doing it every night at dinner. And another thing, he's sweet on that new parlourmaid, the one called Yates. He follows her about everywhere with his eyes."

"Well?" said Larose, for she had suddenly stopped

speaking.

"And on Monday night," went on Miss Brand slowly,

and speaking with great deliberation, "I saw Captain Dane trying to kiss that girl behind a screen in the lounge, with the butler watching them through the banisters at the top of the stairs." She spoke almost in a whisper. "And he had such an awful look on his face—the look of a man who would murder if he could."

"And you suggest?" said Larose.

"That he killed him," replied Miss Brand. She threw out her hands. "Why, nothing would have been easier. Captain Dane had had plenty to drink that night, he dropped off to sleep before the fire and he was struck when asleep!"

"What was the butler like, the next day—after the murder had been discovered?" asked the detective

thoughtfully.

"Frightened, very frightened," replied Miss Brand quickly, "and his temper was all in rags. I heard him swear most dreadfully at Sir James's chauffeur. I was by my bedroom window and they were standing on the gravel path underneath."

"What was he swearing about?" asked Larose.

"I don't know. Their voices were both lowered, but I distinctly heard Slim call the chauffeur a fool—with many unpleasant adjectives before it."

A long silence followed and then the detective said:

"And this is all you can suggest, Miss Brand?"

"And it's quite enough, isn't it?" was the sharp reply, "when I've probably named to you the murderer?" She moved over to the garage doors. "Now, I'll go away first, please, so that they won't know I've been talking to you, for you're not "—and she smiled dryly—"in great favour with my friends."

"But one moment, please," exclaimed Larose quickly.
"I'd like to ask you one thing as you're being so helpful.

What sort of party now is Mrs. Culloden?"

At once the expression upon Miss Brand's face became cold and reserved. "A clever woman," she replied sharply, "and she's written several books. Her Legends of Old Scotland is almost a classic." She tossed her

head slightly. "But like all clever people she's eccentric and she's a trial to her poor husband night and day." Her voice took on a peculiar tone. "Yes,

night and day."

The detective nodded his head thoughtfully when she had gone. "We're getting on," he said to himself, "we're getting on, and there are quite a lot of candidates now for that seven-foot drop. This woman's clever and I can't sum her up yet. There's certainly something in what she says about Slim, but it's quite possible there are several criminals here instead of only one."

He waited a minute or two and then himself passed out of the garage and made his way across the grounds to the lodge. In answer to his knocking, after quite an appreciable delay, the door opened narrowly, and a man put his head round. He looked rather dismayed

when he saw Larose.

The detective disliked his appearance at once. He had a big round face with flabby cheeks. His eyes were small and beadlike, and he had a large coarse mouth. His complexion was pasty, and in form he was square-set and inclined to be stout. He looked not unlike a prize-fighter rather run to seed.

"Hum," thought Larose. "Sir James is no judge of men, whatever he may be of women. This chap is a

most unpleasant fellow."

But the detective modified his opinion within the next few seconds, for the man's surprise over, his eyes twinkled humorously and his face broke into an attrac-

tive boyish smile.

"Mr. Larose, the detective!" he exclaimed heartily, in a loud, booming voice. "I've been expecting you all the afternoon, sir. One of the girls told me you'd been giving them all a good dressing down"—he screwed up his eyes—"and I suppose it's my turn now," and he pulled the door to behind him and stepped into the drive.

"But I'd like to speak to you inside," said Larose smiling. "We can't hold a long conversation here."

The man seemed a little taken aback but, quickly

recovering himself, he pushed back the door noisily

and held it open for the detective to walk in.

Larose found himself in quite a fair-sized room and, with a sweeping glance, he took in its contents. It was by no means poorly furnished, but it was very untidy. In one corner was a handsome wireless cabinet, and across another a small piano. There were two comfortable arm-chairs, and a book-case full of books. It was evidently the living-room, for there were the remains of a meal upon the table and among other things he noticed a large and freshly cut ham and a bottle of whisky.

"I'm afraid I've disturbed you at your meal," he said.

"No," replied the man, "I've just finished."

"But your wife—I've frightened her away?"
The chauffeur laughed. "She doesn't happen to be in," he replied. He saw the detective looking at the two dirty plates upon the table and added quickly in explanation, "She's only just gone out, though. She's gone into the town to do some shopping." He pushed forward a chair. "But won't you sit down, sir?"

Larose took the chair and began his questions at once. "You've been here four years?" he asked.

"Nearly four," was the reply, "but I've known Sir James Marley much longer than that. I was his batman part of the time during the war."

"And what do you make of this murder then?"

asked the detective.

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I make nothing of it, sir. It's beyond me."

"But you must think something," said Larose sharply.

"You must have formed some idea."

The man looked wooden. "I'm an old soldier, sir, and I know my place. It's not for me to talk of my ideas."

Larose thought for a moment. "You have charge of those dogs. How long have you had them?" he asked.

"Ten weeks, come Tuesday," was the instant reply.

"Are they savage?" The man nodded. "Not too good with strangers," he said, "particularly so when it's dark. They've been specially trained as watchdogs, and can bring down their man."

"And so that's why they're always muzzled," asked

Larose, "when you turn them loose at night?"

"Not exactly," smiled the man. "It's baits we're afraid of then. Poisoned meat thrown over the railings." He looked impressively at the detective. "There's been lots of burglaries about here lately and Sir James got these dogs on purpose to prevent anyone getting over to the house. They are never loose except at night."

"And you're the only one here that can handle them,

then?" asked Larose.

"Me and my wife," replied the chauffeur, "and Lady Marley and Mr. Slim." He seemed amused. "They've

never quite taken to Sir James."

The detective regarded him thoughtfully. "And is it your opinion then," he asked, "that no one could cross over to the house at night without them giving warning?"

"My oath it is," was the instant reply. "They'll hear a leaf fall in these grounds when the night is quiet, and Tuesday night was like a grave"—he nodded his head

significantly—" and there was a good moon, too."

"Well," said Larose, "if the dogs didn't give tongue, no one crossed over, and it must be your opinion then that Captain Dane was killed by someone already in the house."

The chauffeur shrugged his shoulders and making no reply turned his head and looked out of the window.

"You could have crossed," went on Larose quietly. The man turned back in a flash. "Yes, I could," he replied, looking defiantly at the detective, "but I didn't." His face was contemptuous. "How could I have got in and then afterwards locked myself out?"

"You knew Captain Dane had won a large sum of

money?" said Larose.

The chauffeur nodded. "Yes, two thousand, two

hundred and fifty pounds," he replied. "I heard them talking about it as I was driving back from the races in the car, but that doesn't make me a murderer or a thief."

"And you knew it was all in banknotes?"

"Yes, and Mr. Culloden said then it was dangerous for anyone to have so much about him in notes." He nodded his head emphatically. "The murder was nothing to do with me."

Larose smiled. "Well, we've no evidence against you as yet, but tell me who were you driving home from

the races that afternoon?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Culloden, Colonel Mead, and Miss Brand, in the Sunbeam limousine."

"How many cars went to Goodwood, and who

drove them?"

"Five, and the gents were all driving their own except the one I was in. The Sunbeam belongs to Mr. Culloden. No one brought a chauffeur down." He sighed and looked sorry for himself. "I have eight cars here now to look after and clean."

"Who did Captain Dane go with?" asked the

detective.

"With Sir James and his lady and Lady Drews."

"Lady Drews was supposed to be very friendly with Captain Dane, wasn't she?" queried Larose eyeing the

chauffeur intently.

The man's face was quite expressionless. "Don't know," he replied. "I never know much of what goes on inside the house." He spoke without interest. "At any rate she wasn't sitting next to him when they were driving home. She was next to Sir James, and Lady Marley was at the back with the captain. I saw them as they went off in front of me. I followed last," he explained, "in case anyone had any trouble or punctures."

"But all the gentlemen didn't drive cars?" asked

Larose.

"No," replied the chauffeur, "not Colonel Mead or Dr. Merryweather or Captain Dane. The captain couldn't," he added, "because he's got a lame arm."

"But doesn't Dr. Merryweather drive?" asked Larose, as if rather puzzled. "I thought he had several cars."

"He's got a Bentley at home," said the chauffeur, "but

he never drives."

"But he's very interested in cars," asked Larose,

"he's very mechanically-minded?"

The man hesitated. "He's been messing about a lot in the garage these last two days," he replied, "but he doesn't know much about cars, and he's certainly no mechanic. Yesterday he brought in a broken buckle off a strap, and tried to mend it himself. He hindered me a lot, looking for all sorts of tools."

The detective rapped out his next question like a

bullet from a gun:

"Do you see much of Mr. Slim?" he asked, and there was a hard and almost threatening note in his tone.

The man's jaw dropped, his eyes blinked and his face took on a cautious, wary look. It was a long moment before he replied.

"No-o," he said slowly, "I don't see much of him."

"Do you like him?" asked Larose. "Are you friends?"

"Ye-s, we're friends," replied the chauffeur and still speaking very deliberately as if he were weighing his words. "We get along all right together—me and Slim."
"Then why was he slinging off against you," snapped

the detective, "the morning after the murder? What

did he mean by calling you an ensanguined fool?"

The man was now obviously startled, his face went ghastly, and for a few seconds he looked the very picture of surprise, but he pulled himself together quickly, and replied huskily: "I don't know what you mean. He never called me any names."

"Oh, yes he did," said Larose. "You were arguing

with him on the drive leading to the garage."

"I know nothing about it," denied the man quickly. "We have never had any row at all, in fact "-and he appeared to consider--" I don't remember I said a word

to him that day. Certainly he never called me any names."

Larose looked very stern. "You're lying, Mr. Binks," he said quietly, "and it is at least the second lie that you have told me since we've been talking here. You said your wife was out and she's hiding in another room. Her cup of tea, the ham on her plate and everything she was eating is only partly——" was eating is only partly-

But an inside door clicked open and a woman stepped

briskly into the room.

"It's no good, George," she said sharply, "I may just as well see this gentleman now, as later on." She turned to the detective. "It's all my fault, sir. We knew you would be coming, but I didn't want to see you." She was controlling herself with an effort. "I've been frightened enough already by this murder, and if it wasn't for my husband, I'd have gone to my people at once." A contemptuous look came into her face. "No police would have stopped me."

The detective regarded her interestedly. She was about seven or eight and twenty, and pretty in a flashy sort of way. She was very much got up, with her hair a bright golden colour and her eyebrows plucked out to a straight line. Her eyes were blue and rather glassy. She was tall and elegant in figure and smartly dressed, with plenty of jewellery. She looked Larose boldly in

"We've nothing to hide," she went on sharply, "and

I'm quite respectable."

The detective smiled. He had no wish to make an enemy of her, for if he were going to get anything out of her he was sure it would not be by any hostile questioning.

"But it was foolish to run away," he said pleasantly, "for if you have nothing to hide, no amount of questioning can bring you into any trouble." He shook his head. "Keeping out of sight, as you did, is inclined to make

anyone suspicious." "But you've nothing to be suspicious about," retorted the woman quickly. "Neither of us knew anything

about the murder until the police told us."

"Well, about this quarrel with Mr. Slim," said Larose persuasively, "it has come to my knowledge and you may, both of you, just as well tell me. I don't suppose for a moment it has anything to do with the murder"—his voice hardened—"but I want to know what happened."

"It never happened," said the woman firmly, "or I am sure my husband would have told me." She nodded her head emphatically. "Oh, yes, I heard all you said.

I was listening and I don't believe a word of it."

"And you still deny," said the detective turning to the chauffeur, "that you and Slim were angry with each other upon the morning of the murder?"

"I do," replied the man contemptuously. "It's the

first I've heard of it."

Larose gave it up and, smiling again, turned back to the wife.

"And how long have you been married, Mrs. Binks?"

he asked.

"Three months, and I was properly married too," she replied pertly, "whatever you police would like to think."

"An Eastbourne girl?" asked Larose.

"No, I'm a Londoner, but I was in service once in this town and have an excellent character. I was three years with Admiral Bain, and he and Mrs. Bain——" But she stopped suddenly and, although he did not turn in time to catch it, the detective was sure that her husband had flashed her a warning glance.

"Mrs. Bain—what about her?" he prompted, as the

girl did not go on.

"They thought a lot of me," she replied, "that's all,"

"I'm sure they did," agreed the detective heartily. He rose to his feet. "And now I'll go and have a look at those dogs; so good day, Mrs. Binks, and I wish you a happy life and a long family." And with a final smile he passed through the door and followed the chauffeur

round to the back of the lodge where, behind some stout steel bars enclosing a small yard, two big Alsatian dogs

were lying.

The dogs rose warily to their feet as he approached and, with their ears cocked and paws uplifted, regarded him very suspiciously. They were magnificent-looking beasts, and the detective formed the instant opinion that they would be most unpleasant customers to tackle if their tempers were once roused.

"But they don't seem savage brutes," he remarked to the chauffeur after a moment; "only just alert and

watchful."

"They know what they are here for," replied the chauffeur gruffly, "and won't stand nonsense from anyone." A thought seemed to strike him and he grinned sneeringly. "Like to go inside?"

Larose hesitated. "I don't usually court trouble,"

he replied slowly, "only a fool does that." He stared hard at the dogs and then suddenly looked amused. "Yes, open the door," he smiled. "Dogs generally take to me."

It was now the chauffeur's turn to hesitate and with puzzled frown and with his small eyes screwed up tightly, he watched Larose button up his jacket and change a handkerchief from one pocket to another. He made no movement however, to open the door.

"Come on," said the detective sharply, "I can't wait

here all day."

The man awoke to action suddenly. "Well, mind you," he said gruffly, "you do it at your own risk. I've warned you that they're not kittens and I'll not be responsible if you get more than you expect."

"That's all right," said Larose. "I'll take care of

myself."

With a shrug of his shoulders, then, the chauffeur strode up to the cage and planting his feet firmly a few inches from the door, lifted up the catch.

"Now in you go, quickly," he said. "I can't open it wide for they're heavy beasts and may try to rush out."

Larose squeezed through the narrow opening that the man had made and without the slightest hesitation walked up confidently to the dogs.

"Good old boys! Good old boys!" he exclaimed heartily. "Now you wouldn't bite your Uncle Joe, would you?" And he laid his hands upon their heads.

The dogs had suffered his advance without a movement or a sound, but it was evident from their tense and alert attitudes that they were not inclined to be too friendly. They stood as if carved in stone, with their limbs rigid, their heads outstretched and their big eyes watchful and unflinching.

"Good old boys, good old boys," went on the detective, and he began now to pull gently upon their

ears.

A few moments followed and then it seemed the big beasts were prepared to resign themselves with bored indifference to his attentions for, as if with a preconcerted movement, the tension of their limbs relaxed, their heads sank down and turned away and they dropped upon their haunches. They no longer looked in the detective's direction but, with narrowed eyes, blinked out sleepily through the bars of the cage.

Larose nodded to the chauffeur. "No vice here," he exclaimed smilingly. "It's just the way you handle

them—that's all."

But the chauffeur made no comment. His pig-like eyes were blazing and his pasty face was screwed up into an ugly frown. Suddenly, then, all at once, he thrust his jaw forward and a sound like the hissing of an angry snake came sharply from between his lips. He hissed loudly and vigorously and the peace and quietness within the cage of the Alsatians was broken like the bursting of a bomb.

The big dogs leapt to their feet and began dashing furiously against the bars of the cage. They snarled as if the chauffeur were lashing them with a whip and springing from one end of the cage to the other, sought for an opening to get at their tormentor.

Jane 1

"Hiss-hiss," went on the chauffeur, making his hissing the louder and more sibilant, and the dogs responded in

more vicious bursts of fury.

"Stop it—stop it, you fool," yelled Larose, "I've got a pistol here and if I have to use it, I may happen to shoot wide and I promise you'll get one in the stomach, quick and lively. Stop it—I warn you."

The chauffeur was gloating in his excitement, but then seeing that the detective was in reality holding an automatic in his hand, the malignant joy upon his face died

down and faded into a sheepish grin.

"All right, all right," he exclaimed quickly, "it was only a little joke to put the wind up you. They're not likely to do you any harm," and he swore angrily at the dogs. "Damn you! Stop it, will you? What's it all about? Down Esau, down Noah!"

The animals were quietened at once and contented themselves now with sullen growls, with their eyes fixed

gloweringly upon the chauffeur.

With no movement that betrayed any signs of haste, Larose approached the door of the cage and slipping his arm through the bars, in two seconds had uplifted the catch and was standing safe outside. He returned his automatic to his hip pocket and then with a sigh, wiped the sweat from his forehead with his pocket handkerchief.

"Had a bit of a fright, didn't you?" sneered the chauffeur. "I thought you were taking on too much." His lips curved contemptuously. "It was lucky for you

that I was here to quieten them down."

For a moment the detective regarded him very thoughtfully and then like lightning his arm shot out and

he gave him a stinging box upon the ear.

The man reeled back, gaping in his surprise, then his face became contorted in fury and darting forward he aimed a fierce blow with his clenched fist at the detective's head. But Larose sprang to one side and catching the outstretched arm gave it a vicious wrench, at the same time thrusting the chauffeur forward so that he almost measured his length upon the ground.

"That's ju-jitsu, my friend," he remarked calmly, as the man staggered to his feet and, with an agonized expression, began rubbing his arm. "Hurts a bit too, doesn't it? No, no, don't come at me again. I'll break your arm if you do, next time." His voice rose in anger. "You brute, you meant those dogs to go for me."

The chauffeur was opening and shutting his mouth and breathing hard. He was evidently in two minds what to do, but then suddenly he forced his face into a

a reluctant smile.

"You've got a bad temper, Guv'nor," he said reproachfully, "and you'd no business to strike me like that. You can't wonder I got in a rage. It was only a little joke after all, and the dogs wouldn't have touched you as long as I was here."

Larose felt annoyed. He had lost his temper, which he very seldom did, and it galled him now to think that, under whatever provocation, he had hit the man. He

tried, however, to pass it off.

"I don't like your jokes, sir," he said carelessly, "and

after all it was only a little tap I gave you."

"It was quite a hard crack," growled the chauffeur feeling gingerly over his ear and then looking down upon his hand. "I'd have sworn you were wearing a ring and

had cut me. It stings quite a lot."

"Ah!" ejaculated the detective as a startling train of thought leapt into his mind. "Ah!" But suddenly he heard close near the sharp click as of a telephone receiver being replaced upon its hook and he shook his head in annoyance. "Confound it," he muttered, "that woman's been phoning up to warn Slim and I can't spring a surprise on him now. What a fool I am! I ought to have thought of that."

There was the sound of a door opening and the chauffeur's wife tripped into the yard. She was smiling and, evidently very pleased with herself, greeted the

detective in a most friendly way.

"They're beautiful dogs, aren't they, Mr. Larose?" she exclaimed brightly. "Sir James paid a lot for them

for they're proper police dogs and have been specially trained. If you understand them they can be made to go for anyone when you set them on."

"They're quite gentle," said Larose dryly, "and no

vice in them at all."

"Oh, you look at this, then," she laughed, and standing close before the bars, she began hissing exactly as her husband had done.

Instantly then the dogs became excited again and

began growling and leaping about, as before.
"They think they're being put on to someone," she

called out, "and I should be very sorry-"

"Stop it, Sue," shouted her husband, looking very disconcerted. "I've been showing Mr. Larose that, already, and it'll spoil their tempers if you aggravate them."

Larose had quite recovered his good humour. "Thank you, Mrs. Binks," he said, lifting his hat and turning to go back up the drive, "and you, Mr. Binks, too. I'm sure I've had quite an interesting little quarter of an hour. But I must be off now, although "-and he nodded to the chauffeur-" I may want to have another chat with you later on."

"Damn you, Sue!" exclaimed the chauffeur angrily, directly Larose was out of ear-shot, "you did the worst thing possible then. I'd tried to hiss the dogs on to him already when the conceited ass went into their cage, and then when he threatened to shoot me, I had to pretend it was all a joke, and then out you come and give the

whole thing away."

The woman's jaw dropped in consternation but she quickly recovered herself and nodded her head

vigorously.

"Well, there's no harm done," she said sharply, "for I phoned Slim and he'll deny everything, but he warned me, George "-she spoke very impressively-" that this Larose is very dangerous. He's been asking him all sorts of awkward questions already."

"Of course, he's dangerous, damn him," swore her

husband viciously, "and I wish to blazes I'd never seen

that liar, Slim."

"And Slim warned us too," went on the woman dropping her voice to a whisper, "to speak very quietly when we're talking together, for Larose, he says, is just the very man to prowl about after dark and try and listen at the windows."

"Oh! he is, is he?" snarled the chauffeur. "Then the dogs shall have their muzzles loose to-night and they won't be so soft then, as they were just now. They'll

go for him if he comes into the grounds."

"Good," ran the detective's thoughts as he walked up the drive; "he did his best to make those dogs go for me and therefore he's got some good reason for wanting me out of the way." He laughed softly. "And the inspector said there were no clues. Why, they're sticking out everywhere!"

CHAPTER VII

DEEP WATERS

ETURNING to the Court, Larose saw Gentry Wardle and Colonel Mead seated together in a corner of the lounge hall and at once approached them.

"May I have a word with you gentlemen, please," he said quietly. "One at a time, though," he added, "and

I'd like to speak to Mr. Wardle first."

There was no reply for a moment and then the barrister spoke. "I suppose so," he said carelessly. "That's what you're here for, isn't it?" He looked scornfully at the detective. "Where would you like the conversation to take place—upon the scene of the murder?"

"No, here will do," replied Larose, "and I don't

suppose I shall keep you long."

Colonel Mead rose and, walking away, seated himself at the other end of the hall, whilst Gentry Wardle, appearing very bored, started to take out a cigarette. "No, don't smoke, please," said Larose sharply.

want your whole attention and no hesitation whatsoever

in replying to the questions I am going to ask."

Gentry Wardle's face flushed angrily. "What damned impertinence-" he began, but he checked himself suddenly and putting down the cigarette leant back and regarded the detective with scorn. "Very good," he went on, "every little dog has its day and to-day, I suppose, is yours."

"Well, what time did you go to bed upon the night of the murder?" asked Larose quickly.

"Haven't the remotest idea," was the instant reply.

"Was it eleven or half-past or twelve or later?" asked the detective.

"Haven't the remotest idea," was again the reply.

"Did you leave any of the others down here when you went up to bed?"

"I may have or I may not have."

"Which others?" asked Larose. "Whom did you leave behind?"

"I don't remember."

"Think, please," said the detective quietly, "for since that night you must have many times gone over in your mind the minutest things that happened then. Now, whom did you leave behind? Mention someone."

"I don't remember," repeated Gentry Wardle, like

a parrot.

The detective began to lose patience. "Come, come, Mr. Wardle," he said sharply, "you are being absolutely untruthful. As a barrister, you know what it is to question unwilling people and you are now acting the part of an evasive witness yourself." He spoke very sternly. "I tell you frankly that if your replies don't satisfy me, I shall have you served with a subpæna to attend the adjourned inquest."

"Subpæna me!" exclaimed Gentry Wardle furiously, stirred at last out of his equanimity. "What the devil

for?"

"Because of your expressed disapproval of certain conduct of the dead man," snapped Larose, "and to explain your assertion that you yourself would not have put up with it."

The barrister's jaw dropped in dismay, but then quickly recovering himself, he demanded savagely: "What do

you mean?"
"What did you mean?" retorted Larose. "What cause had you for criticizing the conduct of Captain Dane?"

"And what evidence have you," blustered Gentry Wardle, "that I did criticize his conduct, as you put it?"

"Oh, this house is full of whispers," replied Larose, and a great deal more is known of you all than you think. We are quite aware you were not friendly disposed towards the Captain."

"I was neither friendly nor unfriendly," returned the barrister. "I had only known him three days and he was nothing to me. He was just a passing acquaintance,

nothing more."

"Then what made you make any criticisms about

him at all?" insisted Larose.

"I don't know that I am prepared to admit that I did," replied Gentry Wardle boldly, "except "—and for the first time he hesitated—"except, perhaps, that I may have remarked casually I was not too much taken with his general familiarity with the ladies." His lips curved to their habitual sneer. "He had only known them a few hours and he was presuming too much, I thought, upon his brief acquaintanceship with them."

"His familiarity with which of the ladies?" rapped

out Larose like a bullet from a gun.

Gentry Wardle looked the detective straight in the face. "With all of them," he replied instantly. "He would monopolize any and every one of them as if they were old friends."

Larose dropped his eyes. He sensed somehow, that he was on the verge of a discovery, for the very vehemence of this last reply suggested an eagerness on the part of the barrister to drive home the futility of any further questioning in that direction.

A moment's silence followed and then, to the annoyance of the detective, Clark Rainey came into the hall.

"Rainey," called out the barrister instantly, and as if in some relief, "here, I want you." He indicated Larose. "This gentleman—"

"If you please, Mr. Wardle," broke in Larose sharply, "I don't want our conversation interrupted. I shall have something to ask Mr. Rainey himself afterwards."

But Clark Rainey, taking no notice whatsoever of the detective's protest, approached, smiling blandly. He was a good-looking young fellow, about six or seven and twenty, with good features, good complexion, and a pair of big blue eyes. Tall and slender and faultlessly dressed, he radiated the impression that he was of a happy, care-free disposition and would enjoy all the good things of life as they came his way. He regarded the detective with amusement but addressed himself to Gentry Wardle.

"What is it, Wardle?" he asked. "What do you

want?"

Larose realized that for the moment he was outmanœuvred and took it philosophically. Remembering what Betty Yates told him, he had intended questioning Clark Rainey before the barrister could have passed on any warning, but the inopportune appearance of the actor had spoilt this arrangement and so now he resigned himself to watching closely what would pass between them. He could let them of their own accord, he thought, convince him that the suspicion that was form; ing in his mind was correct or otherwise.

The barrister was now cool and collected. He was evidently of opinion that he had got the situation well

in hand.

"Mr. Larose has heard whispers," he said sarcastically, "that Hector Dane had enemies here and that I was one of them." He spoke as if he were amused. "Were you aware of it?"

The actor looked very solemn and appeared to consider. "Well, he won a tenner from you on Saturday, remember," he replied judicially, "and if that has come to the knowledge of this gentleman it may perhaps have sug-gested the idea to him." He turned to Larose and smiled blandly. "In the circles in which you move, sir, I can quite understand the acquisition of even ten pounds might possibly engender black thoughts and perhaps even presage murder and sudden death, but "-he shrugged his shoulders and spoke ever so pleasantly—" with us,

I assure you, anything won fairly at cards leaves no enmity behind."

Larose grinned at the polite words so insolently yet

charmingly expressed.

"Thank you very much," he said meekly. "I know I've a lot to learn." His face hardened suddenly. "But I'll ask you one question, please, Mr. Rainey, and kindly answer it at once without looking for any lead from Mr. Wardle." He paused a moment and then burst out quickly: "Now, what made you agree with Mr. Wardle when he said he'd give short shrift to Captain Dane because of certain conduct of his?"

The actor stared blankly at him. "I beg your pardon," he drawled, "but I really don't understand. I don't

know what you mean."

"Oh, yes you do," said Larose sharply. "You and Mr. Wardle were annoyed with Captain Dane and you were overheard to express that annoyance. Now, what were you annoyed about?"

Clark Rainey shook his head. "Captain Dane never annoyed me," he replied with a smile. "On the contrary, he was good company and most entertaining.

His stories----

"But you didn't like his influence over Miss Winchester," interrupted Larose sternly, "and you can't

pretend you did."

For one fleeting second it seemed the actor was startled, for his eyes narrowed and the lines of his face grew stern, but the surprise passed quickly and he

dropped into his easy smile again.

"I didn't notice it," he replied, regarding the detective good-humouredly, "and indeed I should rather have thought that the boot would have been on the other foot." He sighed dolefully. "Miss Winchester is a very charming young lady and we are all in love with her."

Larose bit his lip. The two together were quite a match for him and although he was positive they were both lying, he realized that for the moment it was waste

of time to try and get more out of them. He rose to his feet with a frown.

"Thank you," he said curtly, giving them both a nod, and he moved off at once towards the other end of

the hall, where Colonel Mead was sitting.

Clark Rainey looked at the barrister and smiled. "Well, he didn't get much change here," he remarked complacently. "At any rate, not out of me."

"No," replied Gentry Wardle, regarding the actor

curiously, "you choked him off very well."

"But what had he been asking you?" demanded Rainey with a sudden change of voice and lowering his

tone almost to a whisper.

Gentry Wardle frowned. "Someone," he said slowly, "one of the servants, of course, must have overheard us talking about Dane when we were sitting here the other night and he's been pumping them about it. He wanted to know what we had got against the man."

"Oh!" exclaimed the actor and he looked uneasy.

"But he didn't learn anything," went on Wardle quickly, "and from his questioning, the girls could have only picked up a chance word or two of what we said." He shook his head warningly. "Still, he's unpleasantly active, this fellow, and it's disquietening for anyone who has anything to hide."

Clark Rainey nodded his head as if he quite agreed and then, adjusting his monocle, took a long, hard stare at the detective, who had now seated himself next to

Colonel Mead at the other end of the hall.

The colonel was a stout man in the middle fifties and, notwithstanding his red face and evident addiction to good living, was of dignified, if not distinguished, appearance. He looked every inch a man of authority. He had heavy features and big cold tranquil eyes under shaggy eyebrows. His lips were hard set and he regarded the detective in an unfriendly manner.

"I just want to ask you a few questions," began Larose, speaking as if with some diffidence, "because I

understand you had known Captain Dane longer than anyone here."

Colonel Mead nodded ever so slightly and the detective went on: "And how long had you known him, sir?"

"Fourteen years-about." And the colonel hardly

moved his lips.

"And have you seen much of him during the last year—since he returned from abroad, I mean?"

"I've stayed with him," replied Colonel Mead slowly, "he's stayed with me; I've met him at various houses and we've been to race meetings, together." He nodded his head. "Yes, I've seen a lot of him."

"Then tell me," asked the detective carelessly, "who

besides yourself were among his intimate friends?"

The colonel glared. "What do you want to know about his friends for?" he retorted quickly. "It wasn't one of his friends who would want to murder him."

"Certainly not," agreed Larose instantly, "but remember that only clears you and Sir James Marley, for only you two here were his friends. All the others were acquaintances only." He spoke earnestly. am asking you who were his friends, sir, because we want to find out to whom he wrote a letter last Sunday night. We are sure it was to an intimate friend, for from the blotter in his room we see he finished up with 'Yours, H.D.'"

"What did he write in the letter?" asked the colonel,

eyeing Larose intently.

"That's what we don't know," replied the detective. "We can only pick out a half-sentence and a word or two here and there, but we think he may have been writing about something that had happened since he arrived at the Court."

"But what can anything he wrote in a letter on Sunday have to do with his being murdered on Tuesday?" asked the colonel brusquely. "I don't see any con-

nection at all."

"Colonel Mead," said the detective very solemnly, "every action of his since he came here last Saturday,

every word he uttered and every word he wrote may have been leading up to the climax of that ghastly tragedy in the billiard-room. In the three days preceding his murder there may be nothing without its significance, if we only knew. Now who were his intimate friends?"

"Oh, I can't tell you anyone in particular," replied the colonel sharply. "He was always about with different people. He had scores of friends and it would be ridiculous for me to pick out any particular one." He snapped his teeth together sharply. "At any rate, I'm not going to mention anyone. I'm not going to be drawn into anything."

Larose was very patient. "But that's unreasonable, sir," he said. "You shall not be drawn in in any way.

I promise you your name shall not be mentioned."

"I don't care," snorted the colonel. "I'm not going

to give you any names."

The detective regarded his hard eyes and stubborn jaw and realized it would be no good pressing the matter. He changed his line of reasoning.
"Captain Dane wasn't married?" he suggested.

"Not that I know of," was the reply, given very carelessly. "He never told me so."

"But he was a great ladies' man, wasn't he?"

The colonel's eyes narrowed. "He may have been.

Larose shook his head in irritation. "Oh, come, Colonel Mead, you're not trying to help me! You know Captain Dane had the reputation of chasing the other sex and that more than once he'd got into trouble on that account."

"Then you know more than I do," replied the colonel obstinately, "and you'd better cross-examine yourself."

The detective's voice was very stern. "Did you ever borrow money from Captain Dane?" he asked sharply.

It was a moment before Colonel Mead took in the question.

"Borrow money!" he ejaculated. "I'm a well-todo man."

"But what is your financial position at the present

time, for ready money, I mean?"

The colonel got as red as a turkey cock. "Confound you," he spluttered, "you've been sneaking through my pockets as well as spying upon dead men's blotting-pads." He jerked a bunch of keys out of his pocket. "Here, take these and go up to my trunk. You'll find my bank pass-book there and you can see for yourself." He sneered scoffingly. "Learn, Mr.—Mr.—I forget your name—that gentlefolk only pay their bills when they feel inclined."

Larose refused the proffered keys. "I'm not satisfied with your answers," he said sternly; "you are deliberately keeping information from me"—he rose to his feet—"and it will be necessary to make further enquiries

about you."

"Damn," swore the colonel as the detective walked out of the hall. "He can do a lot of harm, that fellow."

Larose enquired of Slim as to the whereabouts of Sir James, and found the baronet in the library. Some

members of the house-party were with him.

The detective looked at his watch. "I must apologize for asking you, Sir James," he said, "but I was wondering if you could let me have the use of one of your cars. I want to get into the town before five."

"Certainly," replied Sir James Marley readily, "my chauffeur shall take you in, or if you would prefer it,

you can drive yourself."

"But why waste petrol?" exclaimed Gentry Wardle smilingly. "I am going into the town myself and will drop you anywhere you like, Mr. Larose."

The detective looked sharply at the speaker. The barrister was addressing him most pleasantly and as if

they were the best of friends.

"Yes, I'm starting straight away," went on Gentry

Wardle, "and I shall be delighted I'm sure."

"I'm going to the police station," said Larose coldly. "Excellent!" smiled the barrister. "I should like

to see it." He made a grimace. "Who knows-it

may be your turn to drive me there next.".

Hesitating for a moment, Larose accepted the offer and accordingly, five minutes later, found himself seated next to the barrister in a big limousine and being driven

swiftly away from the Court. .

"I won't guarantee I'm anything of a driver," laughed Gentry Wardle as they sped along, "and so if we do have an accident you must just regard it as one of the hazards of your profession when working among the criminal classes."

"Quite so," replied the detective who was puzzling over the changed attitude of his companion, "I'm prepared to risk it."

"Ever been here before?" went on Gentry Wardle.

"Ever seen the cliffs up at Beachy Head?"

"No," replied Larose, "this is my first visit to Eastbourne."

"Then I'll show them to you," said Gentry Wardle promptly. "I can go eighty in this and it won't take us five minutes longer." And without waiting for any acquiescence on the part of Larose, he turned the car on to a narrow road that ran steeply up towards the high downs, and began to accelerate sharply.

Their progress was rapid and in little more than a minute they had left all the houses behind them, and five hundred and more feet above the town, a glorious

panorama of sea and downs lay before them.

But Larose was not concerned with the view for, alone again with Gentry Wardle, he considered it an excellent opportunity to press on with his enquiries. He had no intention that the barrister should imagine that any belated good-nature on his part should blunt the keenness of his, Larose's, questioning. He judged also from his recent conversation with him that nothing would be gained by an undue politeness; indeed, rather the other way, for he had seen that when annoyed Gentry Wardle was more open and direct in what he said. He glanced covertly at him and saw now that he was smiling.

"And what sort of a man is your friend Mr. Rainey?" he asked sharply. .

Gentry Wardle elevated his eyebrows.

"Mr. Rainey!" he exclaimed lightly. "Oh, he's

just a gentleman-an ordinary gentleman."

"But you all appear to be gentlemen," rapped out Larose, "although as I have told you, one of you, in my

opinion, is a murderer."

Instantly all the amiability vanished from the barrister's face. He gave one lightning scowling glance at the detective and then with a muttered imprecation, as if suddenly he had come to some determined resolution, he gripped at the steering wheel with hands of steel and jamming down the accelerator, caused the needle of the speedometer to leap to seventy.

The car shot like a bullet along the narrow road, bumping with great violence over its uneven surface and their progress became hazardous in the extreme. On one side of the road, separated by only a few yards of turf, the green downs dropped sheer for hundreds of feet and on the other stretched a high embankment. The road ran upwards like a narrow, winding ribbon towards

Beachy Head.

"Gosh I" ejaculated the detective licking his dry lips, a swerve for the hundredth part of a second and we'll

be over. He's mad."

"You're obstinate are you, you damned mischief-maker?" shouted Gentry Wardle with blazing eyes. He laughed like a maniac. "Well, this is what I came up here for. It'll save trouble for everybody if we go over the Head." His voice rose to a scream. "And I tell you I've a mind to do it."

"All right," shouted back Larose with a stoutness, however, that he did not feel, "over we go and they'll bury us both together," and taking out a cigarette he

began to feel for some matches.

The barrister tossed his head contemptuously and then, crouching low over the wheel, drove the car at its utmost speed. For a minute and more the pace was tremendous

and then suddenly, when the buildings upon the Head were within a hundred yards and the crash over the cliff beyond seemed inevitable, Gentry Wardle lifted his foot off the accelerator and with a ruthless application of his powerful brakes, brought the car to a standstill exactly opposite the main entrance of the Beachy Head Hotel.

Leaning back he drew in a long breath as if his exertions had exhausted him, and then he turned, all amiability again, towards the detective, and remarked

casually as if nothing had happened:

"Come in and have a drink. I think we both deserve it."

Larose followed him inside, surreptitiously, however,

wiping his clammy hands upon his clothes.

"You thought you were gone then, eh?" queried Gentry Wardle with a sardonic smile, when they had been

served with what they had ordered.

"Oh, no," replied Larose coldly, "I didn't take you to be that kind of man. It would have been only a drawn game if we had both handed in our checks and I reckon you always play for a win."

"Exactly!" smiled the barrister, "and I generally get

it too."

They returned to the car and then Gentry Wardle, with great politeness, suggested that perhaps the detective would like to take the wheel.

"We'll go back the other way," he said. "There are some sharp corners but the road surface is better and

besides, it's nearer."

"Well, I don't know much about driving upon hills," fibbed Larose glibly as he settled himself awkwardly into the driver's seat, "but as your brakes seem pretty good, I expect I'll manage all right," and letting in the clutch he accelerated at once to a most reckless rate of speed, along the twisting and turning road that led down to Eastbourne.

There were certainly as Gentry Wardle had said, some sharp corners and their negotiation at any time called for considerable care and skill, but from the way in which the detective now took them it might almost have been surmised that he imagined he was driving upon

perfectly straight road.

He approached every turn at a great pace and then at the last second applied the brakes unmercifully. He seemed nervous and undecided and the car had some very narrow escapes; indeed many times it was only by a matter of mere inches that they escaped disaster.

Gentry Wardle, however, seemed in no way perturbed. He took it all as a matter of course, making no suggestions and offering no advice, but when finally they reached the level stretch of road upon the sea-front and comparative safety, he turned to the detective and patted

him heartily upon the shoulder.
"Splendid!" he remarked with genuine enthusiasm. "A most excellent exhibition of freak driving and with all my experience of cars I am sure I could never have done it." He beamed all over his face. "You are a fine driver, Mr. Larose."

The detective coloured hotly and looked very sheepish. They pulled up at the police station and then Gentry Wardle asked if Larose would like him to call back later.

"Thank you very much," replied the detective, "but I may be some time, and besides"—he grinned—"I think it would be better for my peace of mind if I returned in a taxi. It might occur to you again to take me for another ride along the cliffs."

Gentry Wardle looked very amused. "Only a joke," he called out as he was driving away. "Just a little

joke between friends."

But the detective looked doubtful as he turned into

the police station.

"Ah! Only a little joke, was it?" he muttered. "Well, I'm not too sure about that. I've my opinion it was touch and go for half a minute." He shook his head thoughtfully. "Yes, that fine gentleman has some very good reason for not liking me."

CHAPTER VIII

LAROSE PICKS UP THE TRAIL

NSPECTOR ROBERTS was in his room and greeted Larose anxiously. "Any news?" he

asked quickly.

"Yes," nodded the detective, "plenty. The party we want is up there right enough and as you said, it is only a matter of picking him out. I've had quite a profitable day and there are several lines to follow up. That butler chap has been telling me a lot of lies and he and the chauffeur are in some dirty business together. The Culloden woman walks in her sleep and her husband doesn't know whether or not she had a hand in the murder. The doctor's done something he's desperately anxious to hide, and that Gentry Wardle would stick a knife into me if he got the chance. The actor fellow is not straight and the colonel knows a lot more than he will tell." He shrugged his shoulders. "In fact, almost everyone in that house seems on the defensive." He pulled a chair up to the inspector's desk and went on in sharp, decisive tones: "But now let me have a look at the dead man's clothes. I want to see his trousers and the keys you found in the pockets."

The inspector touched a bell and immediately a police

officer appeared.

"The clothes the murdered man up at the Court was wearing," he said sharply and the constable retired from the room.

The inspector approached a safe let in the wall and unlocked it.

"Here are the keys and wallet and everything that was taken from his pockets," he said, returning to the desk

and unwrapping a small packet.

Larose glanced quickly at the keys, and then with no comment picked up the wallet. The constable came back with a large cardboard box and proceeded to lay out upon the table some stained and rumpled articles of clothing.

"You can go," frowned the inspector, and he turned to watch the detective who had at once pounced upon

the garments.

But Larose's scrutiny of them was very brief for he just pulled out the pockets of the trousers and looked at the linings. Then he frowned and for a long minute

sat in silence in a deep reverie.

"Now, this is puzzling," he said presently and speaking very slowly, "and it does not quite fit in with the theory I was forming." He lifted his eyes to the inspector and went on solemnly. "But we can take it for granted we are up against some very cool and determined customer here, for whosoever the guilty party is—after he had committed the murder—he had the hardihood to take the keys from the dead man's pocket, go up to the dead man's bedroom, abstract the banknotes from his trunk, and then return to the billiard-room and replace the keys back upon the body." He looked down again upon the bloody garments. "Yes, the notes were not upon the person of the captain when he was killed, but "—and the detective's eyes glinted—"his murderer knew exactly where to find them."

"But he had got them upon him at dinner," exclaimed the inspector sharply, "for he said so, openly, before

everyone."

Larose shook his head. "A blind," he replied, "just so that the servants should not gossip about so much money being left in his bedroom." The inspector looked dubious and Larose went on: "Well, now, you are certain these keys here were taken from the left-hand pocket as the body was lying upon the floor? You are

certain, aren't you? From the left pocket and not the

right one?"
"Certain," replied the inspector. "Everything was checked, article by article, and I made out the inventory at the exact moment when my assistant took them out."

"Good," said Larose decidedly, "then you found them in the pocket where the deceased was not in the habit of carrying them. Some other person therefore had been using them and upon returning them to the body, either in carelessness or hurry, had replaced them in the wrong pocket. Don't forget the left-hand pocket would have been the more accessible as the dead man was lying upon his right side."

"But how do you know he didn't always carry the keys in his left pocket?" asked the inspector gruffly.

"Because of the comparatively clean state of the lining of the left pocket, and the polished condition of these keys. There's unmistakable evidence about these keys that he was accustomed to keep them in his righthand pocket along with any coins that he happened to be carrying at the time. Look how shiny they are from constant rubbing against other hard substances."

For a moment the inspector looked thoughtful and

then he smiled.

"A little bit highbrow, isn't it, Mr. Larose?" he said. "Perhaps now he's had these keys for many years, and at times in his left pocket they may have rubbed against other hard substances besides coins—a penknife, for instance, or maybe another bunch of keys when he was at home in his own house."

"But look at the linings of the pockets," said Larose, "and compare them together. The right-hand oneworn and dirty from constant association with hard substances, and the left-hand one-much cleaner and with the surface of the material still rough." He held up the trousers to the light. "And mind you, he's had the suit for a long time. It's not new by any means."

"I keep my keys in my left-hand pocket," said the

inspector slowly and as if still unconvinced, "and always have done."

"Well, look at the lining, then," retorted Larose, "and look at the keys too. Ah, exactly! A smooth, dirty lining and no good polish on the keys. No contact with other hard substances to brighten them up."

He took the keys of the inspector and placed them upon the table beside those belonging to the dead man.

"See the difference," he said. "Yours are quite dull

beside his."

"Well, you may be right," said the inspector after a long pause, "and if you are, then we shall find the same conditions in the linings of all his other trousers up at the Court."

"And so, no doubt, we shall," nodded Larose, looking meditatively down upon the blood-stained clothes. "Yes, this murderer is a man of courage," he went on, "for after striking down his victim and finding he had not got the notes upon him, as I say, he abstracted the keys and crept up to his room, running upon his journeys up and down the stairs, as he must have known quite well the great risk of being heard or seen." He nodded again. "So when we uncover him, we shall find a man of some personality and force of character. No weakling by any means."

The inspector coughed. "But, Mr. Larose," he began—he hesitated, "are you not building up your theory that the murderer had to go up to the bedroom for that money upon a very slender foundation? Now might not the captain for once have put his keys in the wrong pocket and "—he smiled—" the banknotes have been all the time in the hip pocket, ready to the murderer's hand?"

"They might have been, certainly," replied Larose coldly, "but remember—if what you wrote down is an accurate record of what happened, then the bunch of keys was the first thing that your assistant took out of the left-hand pocket. Keys, handkerchief and then the box of matches! A most unnatural order of things, for in the ordinary way, of course, the keys would certainly

have been at the bottom of the pocket or at any rate deeper down than the handkerchief." His tone was emphatic. "No, everything points to the keys having been in use later than the handkerchief and that they were thrust into that left-hand pocket by someone in a hurry."

"Well," said the inspector after a moment, "and what does it prove if you are right?"

"That the crime was done by someone in the house," replied Larose. "It clinches, once and for all, even if we had any doubt about it, that it was an inside job and did not follow upon any attempted burglary." He struck his fist upon the desk. "That murderer had an intimate acquaintance with the ways of everyone in the Court and knew exactly when to go to get those notes."

"I told you at once it was one of that house-party," said the inspector, looking very pleased with himself. His face grew solemn again. "But what are we going

to do next?"

"I am going back to the Court," replied Larose. "I'm stopping there until we are finally stumped or can give the 'all clear.'" He spoke very sharply. "But there's one thing you can follow up at once and it's to do with that fellow Slim. I don't like him. He lied to me and I'm sure he's got some guilty secret somewhere." He bent towards the inspector over the desk. "This is what happened. I questioned him pretty sharply and as he said he'd got money saved I made him show me his savings bank book. He's got a tidy bit there—three hundred and forty-seven pounds—and I noticed two deposits of four pounds ten each made soon after the two last quarter days. I suggested that they looked like payments of rent that had been made to him and he denied it in a way I didn't like. Then taking down from a shelf one of his books Every Man His Own Lawyer, I saw it opened itself at the chapter 'Landlord and Tenant' and the pages had been well thumbed. Then to add to my suspicions I learnt later from the parlourmaid, Betty Yates, that upon the night of last Wednesday week' upon his day off, he had come in smelling of paint.'

Larose frowned. "It's my belief he's got a house somewhere in Eastbourne and he's doing it up in his free time and I want to know why it is necessary for him to tell lies about it. And something more," went on the detective, "I learnt that he and the chauffeur had a good row the morning after the murder, but there are denials too about that." He shook his head. "In my opinion both those gents are fishy for I've got other suspicious things against them as well."

"Well, it's easy to see if Slim's a householder," said the inspector, going over to a row of books upon a shelf. "No, he's not," he went on after a moment, "there's no Ernest Edward Slim here. There's no 'Slim' at all and

"Ernest Edward?" queried Larose. cook calls him 'Will."

"He was sworn as 'Ernest Edward' at the inquest,"

returned the inspector. "That's all I know."

"Hum!" remarked the detective thoughtfully and then after a long pause he said: "Well, put a good man on to go the round of the agents and find out, if you can, to whom any houses fetching eighteen pounds a year rental were sold about last December or January and send another to the hardware shops to trace, if possible, if Slim has been buying paint lately and if so, to where it was delivered. As Marley's butler, they may know and remember him."

"We're looking for a murderer," remarked the inspector glumly, "and you're after a man who's been

buying paint."

"And who knows one may not lead us to the other," laughed Larose, "but, here," he went on, "I want a plain-clothes man to help me to-night—one who knows the Court. Now have you got anyone about I can speak to, at once?"

"Detective Howard," replied the inspector; "he's been on the case from the beginning." And pressing his bell, in less than a minute Larose was regarding a tall,

solemn-faced man about thirty.

"And this is what I want you to do," said Larose when the introduction had been effected. "I shall be on a little job that will take me into the grounds of the Court very late to-night and I don't want those darned dogs yapping round my heels. Now I'll get you a bottle of aniseed and I want you to bicycle up to the Court with it after dark, say about nine-thirty. The gates will be still open then and the dogs won't have been unloosed. Ride boldly through the gates and if anyone speaks to you say you have a note for me. Ride almost up to the front door of the Court and then nip off your bicycle and carry it across the lawn to that big clump of rhododendrons close under the wall nearest the sea. Get among those rhododendrons and then give your boots a good dose of that aniseed, a good healthy dose all over. Then lay a trail everywhere round that side of the grounds. Walk in among those bushes, under the trees and all round the flower-beds. You understand-I want to have a strong scent crossing and recrossing everywhere that will keep the dogs busy all night."
The man nodded. "But, of course, I'm to keep the

stuff away from the bicycle," he said, "so that I can't be

followed outside."

"Most certainly," replied Larose, "and you must take care too not to cross over any of the trails you've laid, with your wheels. Get as near as you can, too, to the lodge with the aniseed because I want the brutes to pick up the scent directly they're let loose. ' Now come with me to a chemist." He looked up at the clock and turned to the inspector. "It's a bit late, I know, but if you should hear anything to-night about that house or the paint, just give me a ring up at the Court. In any case I'll be seeing you early to-morrow. I'll cut off now because I've got several things to buy."

The detective was very thoughtful that evening when getting into his dinner clothes and with a few minutes yet to go before the chimes, he leant back in an arm-chair

and gave himself up to his meditations.

"Yes, I shall do well to take every precaution," ran

his thoughts, "for, if I am right, there is someone here who will stick at nothing and if he thinks I am getting dangerous I may easily get a knock on the head like the captain did. It is quite certain the guilty party will be following every movement I make, and so I am not going to risk creeping about the corridors in the dark to-night." His eyes wandered to a brown paper parcel on the bed. "Yes, when they should all be in bed, I'll just slip out of the window down that bit of rope and get into the billiard-room through the outside door. No one will see me then and I will return the same way and no one

will be any the wiser."

His thoughts ran on. "Now, what have I really found out to-day about the murder? Nothing—except that almost everyone here seems to be holding to some secret and trying to hinder me as much as possible in my enquiries, even to the extent of telling downright untruths when I question them. It is perplexing, for they cannot all be the murderer, although in my present state of mind there is a distinct probability of guilt about several of them." He frowned. "Still it may be only the shame of being mixed up in the crime that makes them appear like that, for with all the lax code of morals, according to the inspector, of this class of people, they cannot, any one of them, like the idea of always being whispered about in years to come as a man who may have committed a murder or, worse still, perhaps, who was a thief and who stole two thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds when a guest among this house-party at Eastbourne."

He sighed deeply. "And then I have Slim and that chauffeur to consider and there I am sure there is something wrong; Slim—lying, and too peculiarly sensitive about his money, and that chauffeur chap living in all that style. A ham that must have cost a pound upon the table, and a twelve and sixpenny bottle of whisky, a good wireless and an expensive piano. Gosh! he must get a lot of tips. And then that cook, Mrs. Salter—she might easily be a woman with a secret for I could feel she resented to an unnatural degree my enquiries." He

shook his head again. "Yes—she puzzles me, for I could have sworn I'd seen her before."

The dinner chimes pealed softly and, hurriedly thrusting the brown paper parcel upon the bed into his portmanteau, he stood still, taking a last survey of

everything in the room.

"Now, I've well french chalked that window and it will go up without a sound," he muttered, "and there is nothing anyone can find out if they come prying in the room." He looked just a little bit uneasy. "Still I wish that portmanteau of mine were a better class. I could almost pick the lock myself with a pin." His face cleared. "But I shall know if anyone has touched it, for it's exactly the length of my tooth-brush away from the wall and the right corner almost touches—not quite—that brown square upon the carpet." He straightened his tie in the mirror. "And now for a good dinner"—he smiled—"and pleasant company."

Descending the stairs he met the butler coming up to

find him.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said the latter. "I've shown him in the morning-room. He wouldn't give his name but "—Slim spoke without expression—"I remember him as one of the plain-clothes policemen who came here."

Proceeding into the room indicated Larose was greeted by a sharp-featured, intelligent-looking man about his own age. "Mr. Larose?" queried the man. "I'm Detective Naylor and I was put on the hardware shops to ascertain if the butler had been buying paint lately."

"Well?" asked Larose, for the man had stopped

speaking.

"In three shops where Slim is known," replied Detective Naylor, "they had no recollection of his having made any such purchase, but in a fourth shop—in a little back street, Castle Street, near the railway station—the shopkeeper told me that two one-gallon tins of green paint, two brushes, a six-foot length of roof guttering and a small, black-lettered plate on a white back-

ground: 'Beware of the Dog' had been taken away one afternoon about three weeks ago by two men in Sir James Marley's car "-the detective spoke very impressively—"and the descriptions he gives of these men tally exactly with those of the butler and chauffeur here."

"How did he know it was Sir James Marley's car?"

asked Larose quickly.

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"Another customer in the shop at the same time happened to comment on it. A Bentley car with a large bronze parrot mascot on the radiator. He recognized it at once. Man named Thomas Wilks. Caretaker at the Eastbourne Cricket Grounds. He's often seen Sir James in it there."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Larose rubbing his hands. "Then by ten o'clock to-morrow we shall know where

the house is."

Detective Naylor looked rather taken aback. "But they didn't know where the paint was taken to," he began: "they never saw—"

began; "they never saw----

"Tut tut!" broke in Larose, "that doesn't matter at all. Get in touch with the postmaster at the head post office here and ask him to broadcast among all the postmen that a pound note will be given to the man who reports where a small house or cottage has been painted green lately and a notice 'Beware of the Dog'-blacklettered on a white background—has been recently affixed." He smiled pleasantly. "It should be very simple."

Detective Naylor's jaw dropped, then he grimaced

broadly and saluted with great respect.

"Very good, Mr. Larose," he replied, "I'll see the

postmaster at once."

"And then," went on Larose, "you'll find out all about those who are living in the house, without, of course, letting them get wind you're making any enquiries. Report to me by noon to-morrow."

It was quite a pleasant dinner that night and to Larose the constrained and unfriendly atmosphere of the

previous meal seemed to have entirely disappeared.

He knew he looked well in his evening clothes and, indeed, flattered himself that from a sartorial point of view, at least, he was quite the equal of any of the other men there.

And perhaps it was because he did not appear out of place in his surroundings and because his suit was well cut and his tie and collar of quite the correct pattern, that something of the annoyance of his presence had passed away.

At any rate it was obvious he was no longer regarded with hostility but rather there was a tendency among his fellow-diners to be favourably disposed towards him.

He saw a charming side of Gentry Wardle too, a side he would never have suspected the barrister possessed. The great legal luminary was all politeness and courtly smiles, and his stern eyes melted with a delighted tenderness as he bent towards the piquant face of Lucy Bartholomew, who was seated next to him. There was no mistaking his interest in the girl.

"And that," thought Larose with a sudden gasp, "is what he meant when he said he had other things to live

for. Why—the man's in love."

He looked round upon the company generally and a great misgiving surged into his heart. Was it possible that among these courtly, aristocratic-looking men there could be a ruthless murderer? Could anyone here be the perpetrator of that savage midnight crime and yet now wreathe his face in smiles and pleasantry as if there were no such things as memory or a guilty conscience?

And then he remembered how often evil had its beautiful setting in the world and, with a sigh, he steeled his heart against any suggestion of sentiment that would undoubtedly weaken his resolve and warp his judgment.

With the meal over and when the ladies had left the

room, Larose happened to catch the baronet's eye.

"And I hope, Mr. Larose," said the latter dryly, "that everything that is possible is being done for you and that your investigations are going well."

The detective nodded. "But I should like a word

with you, Sir James," he replied, "if you can spare me a few minutes."

"Whenever you like," returned the baronet. He appeared to consider and then frowned. "But we are going to have some bridge soon and so perhaps it had better be now." He turned to his guests. "Excuse me, will you, please?" and, rising from the chair and followed by the detective, he left the room.

A moment's silence ensued after their departure and then Gentry Wardle sprang to his feet like a jack-in-thebox and darted to the door. Making sure it was securely shut, he leant his back against it and then uplifted one hand with long forefinger outstretched warningly.

"An excellent opportunity," he exclaimed, "and I have been wondering how I could manœuvre for it the whole evening." His face was frowning and he dropped his voice to a hoarse whisper. "That Larose is dangerous, I tell you—very dangerous—and he suspects a great deal more than any of us could have imagined. His questions are all in the right direction and he only lacks one thing—the actual proof."

There was a dead silence and his fellow-guests regarded him with astounded eyes. None of them made any movement but all sat on like graven images, in their chairs.

"Yes," went on the barrister quickly, "he knows one of us did it and it's my belief he's groping devilishly near that one. Those servants have helped him somehow although they mayn't themselves have been aware of the significance of what they told him." He clenched his hands together tightly. "So a foolish word dropped now by anyone here or the mentioning of some casual little happening that may seem nothing to us, and "—he shrugged his shoulders despondently—"the trouble will be fastened definitely on the right quarter and the scandal will be upon us all."

Still no one moved and the stunned silence was still

unbroken.

Gentry Wardle went on: "I don't want to hurt

Marley's feelings, of course, but—let us not be hypocrites—poor old Jim must be the only one amongst us who regrets that Dane got his deserts. Dane was mad and a little beast, and his attentions to every woman in the house were an insult." He raised his voice angrily. "But, mind you, even if I did it myself, whatever may have been the provocation of the moment, I have no kind thoughts for the man who gave Dane the punishment. The killer was a fool to land us in this mess."

Mr. Culloden spoke huskily. "But those burglars,

Wardle, those burglars-"

"Burglars, be damned!" rapped out the barrister savagely. "It was one of us who did it and we all know it, and in spite of what we told the police we are all suspicious of one another." He laughed scornfully. "Why—I heard plenty of opening and shutting of doors that night and "—he nodded his head significantly—"our doors too, on the landing where we all sleep. I had a splitting headache and was only dozing on and off, and I heard lots of things going on." He lowered his voice again to a whisper. "In the middle of the night I heard someone go into Dane's room with no particular effort that he should not be heard. Then whoever he was went down the stairs and still he wasn't too quiet. Then I'd swear he came creeping up again as stealthily as he could, with his every footfall the footfall of a thief. Then I heard other noises and once someone ran by my door as if he were panting and out of breath."

Gentry Wardle was contemptuous. "But apart from anything I myself heard, as a lawyer and one trained to weigh evidence, I can come to no conclusion but that someone from inside this house brought about Dane's death. The bolted doors and windows of the morning

tell their own story."

He looked round challengingly from one to the other of those seated at the table. "Now, who is going to dispute what I say?"

But for some moments no one made any reply. No one was now looking at the barrister, their eyes were all

turned away and they all seemed busy with their own thoughts. Colonel Mead was puffing stolidly at his cigar as if he had no interest in the question. Dr. Merryweather leant back and blew rings of smoke into the air, and Clark Rainey was drawing imaginary figures with his finger upon the table.

Then Mr. Culloden cleared his throat. "We are not the only men in the house, remember," he began. "The

butler-"

"Bah!" sneered Gentry Wardle rudely. "Imagine Slim having the nerve to kill anyone and then going back quietly to his bed to await the discovery of the body in the morning!"
"But you say one of us did," came quickly from Clark

Rainey.

"We are different," replied the barrister, "and can hide our feelings. But Slim the next morning was almost fainting during those first few minutes before the police came. He had undoubtedly received a terrible shock and he showed it for the time. But he quickly got over it and ten minutes later was answering the questions of the detectives like his calm, normal self. I particularly noticed it." Gentry Wardle smiled sarcastically. "Besides-it wasn't Slim I heard moving about in the night. You never hear his step. He is as noiseless as a cat."

Dr. Merryweather spoke very quietly. "I am not prepared to endorse all you say, Wardle, but I agree with you that we had all better hold our tongues, for certainly that Larose is a most dangerous man." He rose from his chair. "And now I think we'd better join the ladies for "-and he smiled very quietly-" however much we may be able to hide our feelings, as you say, just now we all certainly look like conspirators and Marley might notice it if he returned."

In the meantime Larose was having a most unsatisfactory interview with the baronet in the library, for, without making any specific charge against them, he was trying to shake Sir James's faith in both his butler and his chauffeur. But it was all to no purpose for Sir James was insistent he could not bring himself to have any

suspicions about either of them.

"Half a lifetime in the service of our family, Mr. Larose," he exclaimed warmly, "and with no black mark against him, how is it probable Slim could have fallen suddenly and murdered one of my guests? And as for Binks, although he has certainly not been with us so long, his conduct has always been most exemplary. He is a rough diamond, I admit, but to my mind this very roughness is a proof of his honesty."

And so Larose had left it at that and rejoining the house-party had proceeded to pass the evening among them as if he were in reality a fellow-guest. He played two hands of bridge and then went into the music-room

and chatted with his hostess and the young ladies.

All was harmony and amiability and no one would have imagined the shadow of dark tragedy that lay over

the house.

About ten o'clock, however, the butler, making sure that no one was near, glided into the telephone cabinet and rang up the lodge upon the private line. The chauffeur immediately answered at the other end.

"Mind what you are about, to-night, you fat fool," hissed the butler sharply. "He's up to some tricks right enough. He's doped his window so that it will go up without noise and he's got a long coil of rope in his portmanteau. I think he's going to climb out and spy round your place. He's got a nerve, but loose the dogs without their muzzles. I can't stop for he's liable to come out any minute. Now, mind he doesn't hear either of you talk." And Slim hung up the receiver as unceremoniously as if he had been talking to an animal.

Between eleven and eleven-thirty everybody at the

Court had retired to their rooms.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHAMBER OF DEATH

AROSE was in a decidedly uneasy frame of mind that night, as he lay upon his bed in the darkness, behind his bolted door, waiting for the chimes of one o'clock to strike. He had discarded his evening clothes but he was fully dressed and all ready to slip like a shadow out of his window into the grounds below.

He was not worrying in any way about the dogs for he knew he would only have to run about twenty yards to reach the outer door of the billiard-room, and he was confident that if his instructions had been carried out, the animals would never approach that side of the house, at any rate until long after he had finished what he intended to do.

But he was disturbed in another direction for he was almost certain now that he was not the only one who was in secret activity at the Court. Someone was on the watch and marking every move that he, Larose, made.

He had seen at once, when he had come up, presumably to go to bed, that his portmanteau had been interfered with, for it was now a good half-inch nearer the wall than the length of his tooth-brush, and, moreover, he was strongly of opinion, too, that it had been opened and its contents gone through.

He was almost sure about that, for when he had come up after dinner to get some cigarettes, he had noticed a big fly behind the curtain on his window and capturing

it very carefully with his pocket handkerchief, he had shut it up uninjured in his portmanteau. Then when he had come up and opened the portmanteau, not half an hour ago, no fly had flown out and that could only mean that an opportunity of escaping had already been given it, and he had pursed his lips up ominously together. There was no reason why his portmanteau should have been moved at all, for he had placed it out of the way of everything in a corner of the room, and that it had been opened and gone through could only mean that someone who had seen him return with the brown paper parcel containing the rope had considered it of sufficient importance to take the risks associated with finding out what the parcel contained.

Yes, it was disturbing, for whoever his opponent was, he was working unknown in the dark, whereas he himself

was a marked man and working out in the open.

He switched on a small electric torch and saw that it was twenty minutes to one and he rolled noiselessly off the bed and with a catlike tread approached the window and lifted the blind.

It was almost pitch-black outside for there was no moon showing and the night was misty with the stars very faint overhead, but his eyes becoming gradually accustomed to the darkness, he was able to pick out right opposite to him, the shape of the garage and then that of the big garden shed.

He lifted up the window very slowly and then with his head just above the level of the sill, for minute after

minute knelt as motionless as the house itself.

He heard the big hall clock chime a quarter to one, but he remained on in his position, straining his eyes into

the darkness for any movement outside.

But everything was perfectly quiet and still, and apparently satisfied at last, he groped for a coil of thick rope that lay upon the floor and then proceeded to lower it gently out of the window. The other end of the rope was tied securely to the foot of a heavy wardrobe.

He played out the rope to its full length and then was just in the very act of climbing over the window-sill when he imagined he saw something move by the garden shed. It was as if a shadow had detached itself from the shed wall and melted away into the deeper blackness under the trees behind.

Instantly he was frozen into immobility again and he breathed so gently that it became painful to him. One minute—two minutes—three went by, and then he drew

in a deep, long gasp.
"Nerves, nerves," he whispered. "You saw nothing, Gilbert; you're getting like an old woman." And with no more hesitation, hand below hand, he let himself quickly down the rope. He alighted softly upon the gravel path and then without pausing for a second, tiptoed quickly along by the side of the house. His felt slippers made no sound and he gained the billiard-room door as silently as any creature of the night. Just the faintest click as he turned the key and, in five seconds at most, he was inserting the key in the inside and locking himself in.

Then he gave vent to a big sigh of relief. "And I might probably have just as well come here an hour ago," ran his thoughts, "I've been wasting time and I

shall get very little sleep later in consequence."

He adjusted the curtain carefully in front of the alcove and then flashing his torch to make sure that the curtain over the other door was hanging close, he switched on the small light by the fire-place and took a rapid survey of the room.

"A quarter past one," he whispered as the chime sounded in the hall, "and probably I am very near the exact time when the murder was done. The body was examined by the police surgeon just before seven and it was his opinion that the captain had not been dead a minute over six hours."

He gave a slight shiver. "But I wish there were a fire here as there was upon that night, for really, like that poor fellow did, I'm feeling quite chilly.

He took a long intent look all round the room and then

seating himself in the big arm-chair before the fire-place, he leant back and folded his hands upon his lap.

A long silence followed and then he began talking

softly to himself.

"Now it is the night of Tuesday last or rather it is the morning of Wednesday and about one a.m. I am Captain Dane and I am feeling chilly and am sitting alone before the fire here. The sands of my life are nearly run and I have only a few minutes to live, although I do not know it. Then how do I fill in those last minutes? Do I doze comfortably before the fire? No, I don't think so, for I have taken a large dose of quinine and besides the feeling of chill would make me wakeful. Then what am I doing? Thinking probably—just idly thinking before the fire. But do I continue to sit on before the fire or do I find it too hot for me and move along to that settee where I was killed?"

He shook his head. "No, most unlikely, for the room is large and it would be cold even a little way from the fire. So rather—I am leaning forward and crouching right over the grate. Then what happens? Presently I see someone come into the room. If I am awake I must see him, for from my position here in this chair I command a clear view of the doors. Then is it a stranger who comes in or is it someone I know? Ah! And what happens when he approaches me, for he must have come near to snatch up that poker that is lying within three feet

of where I sit?

The detective's voice trailed away to nothing and for a long minute he sat on in deep reverie. Then he spoke

again, very slowly:

"I was killed in silence. I raised no voice in fear or anger. I made no outcry. I gave no call for help. I made no attempt even to save myself and yet—yet—I must have seen the danger coming, for I received my death blow when standing up and facing my murderer." He frowned in deep perplexity. "What can it mean?"

Again there was a long pause and then he continued: "It almost looks as if there was a purpose in that

silence—as if for some reason I was anxious not to rouse the house—as if I too had my guilty part in what was

going on."

He shook his head in vexation. "Well, if I can't solve it that way, I'll try the other." He strode the length of the billiard-room and stood by the curtain stretched across the inner door. "I am the killer now. It is past one in the dead of night and I come into the room for what purpose? To rob or assassinate Captain Dane or—to get something to drink? Do I come in to kill him? No, no, for I should not in that case have depended upon the finding of a chance weapon ready to my hand—that poker in the grate. Do I come in to rob him then? Well, if that be so, could I have expected to obtain those notes without violence or without him recognizing who was the thief?

The detective raised his eyebrows. "And only the

doctor, Gentry Wardle and old Culloden, as far as I can make out, were aware that the captain was remaining on alone in this room, so that if I enter here with evil intent I must be one of them. He shook his head again. "Well, suppose I am not one of them and, as we are convinced the murder was not premeditated, I am someone else who comes in here by chance knowing nothing about Captain Dane being before the fire—then what happens? Directly I enter, I wonder why the light has been left on and I see the captain at once. I—ah! but I may not recognize him for the second, because huddled up in that chair and with the light shining at the side, it may be impossible to determine on the instant who he is. So, I walk up to the fire-place and then"-Larose sighed a deep, heavy sigh-" it becomes all guess-work again. I am like a blind man groping in the dark. I am at the bottom of a ladder that has no rungs."-

He sat down where he was upon a corner of the settee nearest the door and a score of times and more his eyes roved round the room. He took in its long dimensions with the two big billiard tables, the trophies of the chase, and the clusters of strange weapons upon the wall, the thick Persian rugs, the curtains and the windows, and the beautiful parquet flooring. But in nothing did he find any inspiration and presently with a very dejected/mien he rose up and tiptoed across to where the captain had been killed.

Everything was exactly as it had been when he had come in with the inspector and everything, as he had been told, exactly as it had been found upon the morning of the murder. He saw the blood-stained rug, the dark splashes upon the flooring and the sinister black blotches upon the leather settee.

And then his eyes wandered up upon the wall and took in a cluster of strange-looking, long knives, hanging just above the settee where the captain was killed, and a little above them a bunch of spears ornamented with gay tufts of feathers about midway down their length.

But it was the knives somehow that interested him most. There were five of them and they were too long to be daggers and too short to be swords. Their blades were enclosed in leather sheaths and their guards rested in slots in a sort of oak shelf. The extremities of their sheaths came together and rested in a little leather cup. With their dark oak mounting they formed a picturesque triangle upon the wall.

The detective eyed them intently and speculated as to in what part of the world they had been doing their

devil's work.

"As cruel as hell," was his comment, "and would inflict a dreadful wound whether upon man or beast."

And then, his eyes trained to notice the slightest details, he took in that the middle knife of the five was slightly askew and moving up closer he saw that when last replaced in its sheath the blade had been inserted the wrong way. Its cutting edge was where the back of the blade should have been.

Frowning at the carelessness displayed, he reached up and with an effort, for it was slightly jammed, plucked the knife from its sheath and held it poised in his hand.

Then instantly, with a muttered imprecation and with

his face all puckered in dismay, in a lightning movement but with extreme care, he laid the knife upon the settee and snatching out an electric torch began to inspect the weapon closely.

He saw that in one place the cutting edge of the knife had been turned in as by a heavy blow—there was a splash as of dried blood upon the blade and there was a mark

as of blacklead upon the under side of the hilt.

"Oh, what have I done?" he exclaimed brokenly. "There was a fight here that night; it was the murderer who put back that knife into its sheath, and I have rubbed off his finger-prints with my hand."

For the moment his dismay seemed almost to overwhelm him, but he quickly recovered himself and then

his face took on a grim smile.

"You've been both lucky and unlucky, Gilbert," he said thoughtfully. "You've certainly wiped off any finger-marks that may have been upon that handle by the hard way you gripped at it to pick out the knife, but on the other hand, you've lighted upon a most wonderful clue and it'll be bad luck if it doesn't lead you somewhere."

"Yes, yes," he went quickly on, with his eyes glued upon the knife, "the captain was defending himself with this and the poker broke down his guard. That is blood right enough and that is blacklead, too, without a doubt." He whistled softly. "But how yet can we

explain the silence and why no cries were heard?"

He regarded the knife for a long time, and then suddenly turned with an abrupt movement and striding up to the fire-place, reseated himself on the arm-chair.

"Now I am Captain Dane again," he said quickly, "and I see the man who is about to kill me come into the room. I am not afraid of him and his attitude is evidently not a threatening one for, apparently unaware that I am in any danger, I do not raise my voice and call out. He approaches near enough to me to be able to seize this poker and then—then what happens?"

But stare as he might all round and into the corners

of the room, Larose could find no answer to his question and after a minute he went on:

"What, too, makes me realize that his attentions are hostile and how is it he gives me time enough then to retreat those ten and more paces, reach up to the wall to draw out that knife and turn and face him again before he strikes. Once again—why do I not call out?"

The detective clenched his hands together in his perplexity. "Now why this unnatural silence, for, however the more deadly my weapon is, I must realize that in a fight the odds will be all against me with the handicap of my maimed arm, and it was madness then that I did not call for help."

He rose from the chair and began to pace restlessly to

and fro before the fire-place.

"Yes, it is just as if in that deadly fight for life both the killer and the killed were murderers at heart, and it was vital to each of them that with his dreadful purpose accomplished, he should leave the room unseen and unheard. That they should abstain from noise was the

mutual impulse of them both."

He continued: "But the fight was soon over and then what did the victor do? He did not altogether lose his head, although he was unnerved sufficiently not to notice in his hurry that he had thrust back the knife into its sheath the wrong way and he did not think of disconnecting, as I did this afternoon, that alarm wire on the outer door here so that he could have opened it and given the appearance next morning that the room had been entered into from outside. But he certainly scored one good point, for he went after those two thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds in notes and, not finding them on the body, he borrowed the bunch of keys and got them from the captain's room."

Larose nodded his head. "Now that was a good move for it made it appear straight away that robbery was the motive for the murder." He smiled a grim smile. "But I know differently now, for if the captain had thought that, he would certainly have had no scruples

about shouting out when he saw he was about to be attacked. Then what was it that brought about the

captain's death?"

The detective spoke very slowly and as if he were weighing every word. "Let me draw a long bow at a venture. Say it commenced as a quarrel and the captain's ear was boxed. That would explain the slight wound that the police-surgeon could not account for upon the dead man's ear. It was made by a finger-nail or more likely still by a ring that the striker was wearing. Then the captain, realizing that he was no match in the ordinary way for his assaulter because of his stiff arm, in an excess of fury, and to avenge the insult, darted back to obtain one of those weapons upon the wall. The knives were a little nearer to him than the spears, and he snatched one out. In the meantime his assaulter, apparently less drunk in rage than he, the captain, was, because he had only bestowed a box on the ear when he might have struck with the closed fist—realized a little late what the captain was about to do, and snatching up the poker, as a measure of precaution, he darted after him to prevent him getting the knife. But he was not quick enough and the two met face to face, with the result that Captain Dane came to a bloody death."

Larose smiled whimsically to himself. "Well, Gilbert, you've got it all cut and dried and although there's a lot to speculate about it, it is not improbable that you are right in several respects. Now first let me consider who among the men here wear rings." He ticked them off on his fingers. "Sir James himself, Mr. Culloden, Gentry Wardle, Dr. Merryweather and—but only since the murder, I believe—Colonel Mead. That brings into my bag at least two whose actions have

been peculiar and whom-"

But suddenly the detective's head was jerked sharply round, his jaw dropped in consternation and his eyes dilated wide.

He had heard the sound of a key being inserted in the lock of the door leading into the passage.

A moment's hesitation and then in two bounds he was by the light over the fire-place and, not risking that the sound of the switching off would not be heard, he reached up and plucked the globe from its socket. Then in complete darkness he felt for the nearest settee and crouched down behind it.

A short silence followed and holding his breath, he waited for the door to open and the click of the switch as the room would be flooded with light. All the lights, save the one over the fire-place he knew could be switched

on close by the door.

But for the moment nothing happened and then he heard the key grate in the lock again. It grated several times and then came the sound of the door-handle being turned. It was turned and allowed to spring back, and

then turned again.

Then once more the key was moved in the lock and now the handle was turned at the same time. Then came a gentle bump as if whoever was outside was pushing with his shoulder to make the door open. The door was shaken a little and then there was a complete silence.

The detective dropped upon his hands and knees and snatching a torch out of his pocket, flashed it backwards behind him and began to crawl quickly towards the door

from where the sounds had proceeded.

"He can't open it," he whispered. "The keys he's

got don't fit."

He reached the heavy curtain hanging before the door and thrust his head beneath it. Then with his eyes almost level with the floor he saw a thin streak of light shining in from the passage outside. He heard a sound as if someone were using a file upon metal.

Three or four minutes passed with the file being plied vigorously, then the detective wriggled back like an eel

as the key was inserted in the lock again.

The same performance was gone through as before. The key was twisted from side to side, the handle was turned and pressure was exerted upon the door.

But again all to no purpose and the door continued

to remain closed. The unseen worker, however, was not easily discouraged, and four times, after working hard with his file, for the best part of a quarter of an hour, he returned to the attack.

Then suddenly all sounds ceased, the light under the door disappeared, and neither his ears nor eyes rewarded

the detective any longer.

"Now who the devil was that," he whispered, "and what was his little game? Who would want to come secretly into this room in the middle of the night unless"—he hesitated a moment—"unless it was that crank woman, Mrs. Culloden?"

He switched on his torch and looked at his watch. "Twenty minutes to three and I'd better be off. I've done all I can here for the present and there's a lot to

think over."

With a last reluctant look at the long knife, he replaced it in its sheath—in the correct way this time—and returning the electric globe to its socket, switched off the light and prepared to leave the room.

Passing one of the windows, however, he peeped round the heavy curtain and lifted a corner of the

blind.

"Ah! there's a bit of moonlight now," he whispered, "and I'll be quicker getting back and into bed. I shall be able to make sure, too, that those darned dogs are not sniffing near."

He let himself very quietly out of the door and then he tripped over the recumbent figure of a man lying

crumpled up by the wall.

He sprang back quickly and held himself ready for any emergency but as there was no movement in the figure, after a few moments' pause, he approached, and bending down perceived then to his amazement that he was looking into the face of the butler, Slim.

The man was ghastly white and his forehead was smeared over in blood. He was swathed from head to foot in a long black cloak. The detective reached down

and felt for his pulse.

The butler's eyes opened at once and seeing who it was bending over him, his face took on a terrified look.

"What are you going to do to me now?" he exclaimed weakly. "I'm perished with the cold."

"What's happened?" asked Larose sternly. "What are you doing here?"

But Slim closed his eyes as if in great weariness and did

not answer.

"Can you walk?" asked the detective, and Slim shook his head faintly.

"I'm much too giddy," he said. "It was a dreadful

blow."

Glancing round quickly and seeing that there were no signs of the dogs anywhere, Larose picked up the butler in his arms and swinging him over his shoulder, without more ado set off at a quick pace towards the back of the building.

"Which door shall I find open?" he asked sharply, but from the limpness of his body it seemed that Slim had

fainted and the detective received no reply.

Running round the house, he perceived, however, that the first door he came to was ajar, and he remembered it led into the laundry. In two seconds he was inside and with as little noise as possible closing the door behind him, and shooting back the bolts. Then, still carrying the butler, he tiptoed along the passage into the kitchen and switching on the light, for want of a better place laid Slim upon the table.

The man was undoubtedly in a dead faint; he was almost pulseless and his breathing was hardly discernible. He had got a big bump on the top of his head. Larose loosened his clothing about his neck and chest and began

to chafe his hands vigorously.

But obtaining no satisfaction after a couple of minutes or so from his attentions, he left the man where he was and ran along the corridor into the big lounge hall.

"I'll get Dr. Merryweather," he panted. "We don't

want another corpse in the house."

He darted up the stairs and arriving at the room that had been pointed out to him by the inspector as the doctor's, he drummed softly upon the door with his finger-nails.

"Dr. Merryweather," he whispered sharply with his mouth close to the keyhole. "You're wanted.

Someone's ill."

A faint smell of something came up into his nostrils and he turned the handle softly to see if the door were unlocked. But it was either locked or bolted and he renewed his whisper a little more loudly.

"Dr. Merryweather, open the door please, quickly!"

And then he heard the sharp, incisive voice of the doctor. "Who is it? What do you want?"

"I'm Gilbert Larose," was the hoarse reply, "and there's been an accident; you must come at once."

A moment's silence followed and then came the sounds of bare feet dropping upon the floor, followed by a click and then the light in the room went up. A bolt was drawn back, the door was opened softly, and Dr. Merryweather stood frowningly before the detective. He was thrusting his arms into a dressing-gown and looked very wide awake.

"Well, who's ill?" he asked quickly. "Not another

case of murder, I hope."

"The butler's met with an accident," replied Larose. "He's unconscious in the kitchen and I can't bring him

to. We don't want to wake all the house."

Dr. Merryweather was quite cool and collected. He tied the cord of his dressing-gown, and putting on a pair of slippers, switched off the light in his room and motioned to the detective to lead the way down the stairs.

They found the butler just as Larose had left him, and the doctor was swift and methodical in his examination.

"He's got a nasty bump on his head," was his verdict, "but as far as I can see there's no fracture and he's not lost much blood. He's fainted more from shock than anything." He glanced up at the detective and spoke in quite a matter-of-fact tone. "I suppose you did this?"

"No, I didn't," replied Larose grimly, "and I don't know how he got it. I picked him up outside in the grounds not five minutes ago and he was able to speak to

me then."

Dr. Merryweather made no comment. "Well we must get some brandy for him at once," he said, "and a couple of hot-water bottles and then we'll put him between the blankets at once. You go and wake the housekeeper. Her room is—no, no," he corrected himself quickly and he caught the detective by the arm, "I'll go and fetch her. They've had enough of you already here. You'll frighten her to death."

Some twenty minutes later the butler was comfortable and warm in bed. His head had been bathed and bandaged and he had recovered consciousness. The doctor had returned to his bedroom and Larose was washing

his hands at the kitchen sink.

"And I'm pretty sure," mused the detective as he dried his hands upon a clean dish-cloth, "that our amiable friend the chauffeur gave him that crack on the nut, for muffled up as he was, he might easily have been mistaken for me in the dark." He sighed. "But Slim doesn't think that way nor does that venomous house-keeper either. If looks could have killed me up in that bedroom, I'd be a dead man now. And she might be his sweetheart by the terror on her face when she came in and saw him lying here. My word, but the way she glared at me!"

He frowned. "But I'm not too happy about things here. There've been far too many on the look-out for me to-night, and I'm not out of the wood yet. I've got to go outside and chance it again with those damned

dogs, to climb back into my room.

He switched off the light in the kitchen and made his way very quietly along the passage, back into the laundry.

"Now for it," he whispered. "A quick run and I'll

be up that rope like a monkey before a greyhound could catch me."

He crept up to one of the windows and glued his face against the pane and then in an instant all his confident assurance had vanished.

In the dim light of the partly covered moon he perceived the two big Alsatian dogs just outside. They had got their heads lowered to the ground and were industriously nosing along the very way that he had come when he had been carrying the unconscious butler into the house. Not only that, but he saw with a quickening of his heart that they were unmuzzled.

"Whew!" he ejaculated, "then Binks too thought there was a chance that I should be out in the grounds—

the callous devil!"

He shook his head. "Well, I am not going outside to give those beasts a free bite and I'm not going to wait until the morning to get into my room and risk anyone seeing that rope." He considered for a moment. "Now with a bit of thick wire, it is just possible I might be able to hook up that bolt of mine through the keyhole. It's not much of an affair and won't be hard to pull back."

He searched for a little while and then found exactly what he wanted, in the kitchen, on the lid of an

aluminium pot.

"They'd miss it, of course, and be very puzzled," he

chuckled, "but if I have time, I'll put it back."

He was kneeling upon the floor, in front of the table, with the lid held tightly between his legs to give him better purchase when suddenly he felt a draught behind him and before he had time to turn round, he was pushed violently forward upon his face and a weighty object thudded upon the mat just by his head.

It all happened in a second, and he was not much hurt but the violence of the push had shaken him and he saw stars before his eyes. He retained sufficient presence of mind, however, instantly to roll forward under the table with the intention of preventing whoever it was who was attacking him from making another blow at his head. But nothing further happened and looking round half-dazed, he saw to his relief that he was now alone in the kitchen and that the door had been pulled to once more. A big chopper lay upon the floor where it had fallen.

"Short and sweet," he muttered, "and a half-hearted and clumsy bit of work. Most likely Mrs. Salter. I'll souvenir that chopper anyhow for there may be finger-

prints upon the handle."

Rising rather giddily to his feet he pulled open the kitchen door and flashed his torch up and down the passage, but as he expected he saw no one and so after a few moments he resumed his attack upon the aluminium lid.

Five minutes later and with the lights full up upon the landing, he was manipulating the piece of wire before his

door.

Bent into a curve and with a short hook at the end, he inserted it in the keyhole, and, to give himself better purchase, pulled on the handle of the door. Then, to his amazement, before he had had any chance of making contact with the bolt, the door yielded and he almost fell into the room.

"Jupiter!" he exclaimed incredulously, "and I bolted

it directly I came up to-night."

Flashing his torch to make sure the room was untenanted, he sprang to the window and was relieved to see that the rope was still there.

He caught hold of it to haul it in and then, immediately, it required all the self-control he could command to

smother a cry.

Just where it crossed over the window-sill, the rope had been cut through all but two strands.

CHAPTER X

THE SECRET OF THE COTTAGE

SHORTLY after eleven o'clock the following morning Larose was in earnest conversation with Inspector Roberts in the latter's room at the police station.

He had not, for the time being, thought it necessary to enlighten the inspector as to what he had discovered in the billiard-room, but he had been at some pains to assure him that he was in quite a hopeful frame of mind about the investigations.

He had told him, however, about the injury to the butler, the narrow escape he himself had had from the chopper in the kitchen and how, later, he had found

the rope tampered with in his room.

"But there is not much wrong with Slim this morning," he added, "and a couple of days in bed will see him on his feet again. We are, however, keeping quite dark as to what has happened and only Sir James and her ladyship know. It is being given out that the

man has got a bad cold.

"And that getting into my room was quite simple," he went on. "The screws in the slot of the bolt upon the door had been taken out and their threads well filed away so that when they had been put back, very little pressure upon the door would make the slot fall off altogether—I found steel filings upon the floor when I looked for them. Then later, after the door had been found opened, new screws had been put in the holes so that everything would look all right again." He sighed

ruefully. "I shall be prepared for that little trick another time."

"But you can't be certain that Slim did it," said the inspector thoughtfully. "You have no proof there."

"Well, it wasn't one of the house-party anyhow," replied the detective, "for they were all under my eye practically the whole evening, and that monkeying with the bolt would have taken quite a little time." He looked intently at the inspector. "Slim works in gloves, Mr. Roberts, and he was wearing a pair of dark suède ones when I found him in the grounds. That would account for there being no finger-prints in my room." He spoke very impressively. "And I had noticed those gloves, too, when I went through Slim's things yesterday, in his presence, in his room, and remember making a mental comment at the time that their palms and fingers were worn out of all proportion to the condition of the backs." He nodded his head. "Yes, Mr. Slim has done quite a lot of work in them, in a little time."

"And that business with the chopper," asked the

inspector, "who did that?"

"I am almost sure it was Mother Salter," replied Larose. "It was a very hasty bit of work." He smiled. "You see—using a meat chopper, at once rather suggests a person of a kitchen frame of mind and so, if Mrs. Salter, for instance, came quietly down the passage, and, catching sight of me through the partly opened door, was seized with the idea that there was a chance to injure me, well—what would be more natural than that she should think of the most dangerous thing she was accustomed to handle in her daily life? The chopper when she was chopping meat! I have found out from Betty Yates that the chopper is always kept hanging behind the scullery door and all the cook would have to do was to put her hand round in the dark—she wouldn't risk the noise of switching on the light—and take it off the nail."

"But the absence of finger-prints upon the handle," asked the inspector; "how do you account for that?"

"She was wearing a long dressing-gown when she vas

helping the doctor to bathe Slim's head," replied Larose, "and taking a leaf out of Slim's book, she probably gripped the chopper with one of the loose ends."

"But I don't see why she should bear you any enmity," frowned the inspector. "We've nothing against her."

The detective was silent for a moment. "I am puzzled too," he said slowly, "but I expect light will come soon." He nodded his head. "I tell you, sir, there are things going on in that house, the significance of which we can in no way as yet understand. At any rate, I have stirred up a regular hornets' nest there and those three attempts in one night to injure me, can only mean that we are very near the mark somewhere, for they all suggest that the perpetrators of them are finding it necessary to run pretty considerable risks to cover up their tracks."

He looked very puzzled. "I am dead sure, however, that each of those attempts was made by a different party and the mystery of it is, they don't seem to have been acting in unison. Binks must have been on the look-out for me in the grounds when he loosed those dogs without their muzzles, but he could not have known Slim was going to be on the watch, too, or he would have taken more care to see who he was hitting on the head. It was Binks, of course, who gave the butler that blow. The mistake would have been easy in the dark, and besides, I saw big footmarks that suggest Binks, in one of the flower-beds this morning."

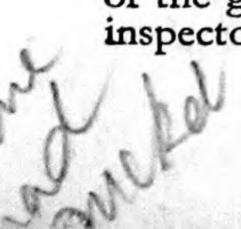
"But you say there's a quarrel on between them," commented the inspector, "and that being so, he may

easily have done Slim in on purpose."

Larose shook his head emphatically. "No, for if you'd seen the expression on Binks's face as he saw me coming out of the gates this morning, you'd have had no doubt whatever whom he'd thought he'd hit. He looked as if he was seeing a ghost."

"And what explanation does Slim give for being out of the grounds in the middle of the night?" asked the

inspector. "Has he given any?"



Larose laughed. "He says he was wakeful and looked out of the window and saw someone standing under the trees, and he went out to see who it was. Very funny—for he didn't even take a stick to protect himself with." The detective became serious. "But now, sir, I'll get you to come up to the Court if you will. I want to set a little trap there this morning."

"And it's time we caught something," commented the inspector grimly, "for those fine birds up there'll be getting restless to try their wings again. What are you

going to do?"

The detective did not reply for a few moments. "Well, this is what I have in mind, sir," he said then. "Of those up at the Court, apart from the one who actually committed the crime, only Sir James Marley, Slim, and the parlourmaid Yates, saw Captain Dane when he was lying dead. Those three are the only ones who could point out the exact position of the body and by which settee it lay, and I want to get all the men of the houseparty into the billiard-room, one at a time, and see if any of them are unduly interested in the spot where the dead man was found."

"Then you've given up the idea," said the inspector,

"that Slim had anything to do with it?"

The detective's face clouded. "I have and I haven't," he replied quickly. "I am convinced Slim is on the crook in some way, but at the same time, from all I have managed to hear, I hardly think that the way he acted that morning, both before and after you arrived, points to him as being the actual murderer." He shook his head. "At any rate, I'm going to leave him out for the present, and go through that other lot, hoping that one of them may definitely give himself away so that I can concentrate entirely upon him, to the exclusion of everyone else." He made a gesture of hopelessness with his hands. "The darned trouble is, I suspect several and can't sort them out."

"Whom then do you suspect?" asked the inspector

sharply.

"Dr. Merryweather, first—a lot. Then Gentry Wardle and Clark Rainey and perhaps—as a rank outsider, the journalist, Felicia Brand. All the others I dismiss at once, although—"and he paused significantly—"I believe some of them have got a good idea as to who the actual killer was."

He bent towards the inspector. "You see, Mr. Roberts, the mistake we were both inclined to make at first, sir, was that the murder was committed for that two thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds, whereas"—he shrugged his shoulders—"unless it turns out after all that Slim did it—I believe the killing was done as a sort of punishment, and all because of Dane's familiarity with some of the women." He smiled. "At least, that's how I've come to regard it."

"Hum!" remarked the inspector thoughtfully. "Well, we shall have to clean up the billiard-room a bit

before we call them in."

"No," said Larose instantly, "that's all been done. I borrowed Betty Yates and locked myself in with her before I came here. We washed out all the bloodstains and well polished up the leather. We took away the fouled rug and as an additional precaution that there should be nothing on the settee near where he had lain to catch the eye, we moved all the settees round—they are as alike as two pins—so that the one that had the stains upon it is now on the opposite side of the room. We've left nothing to chance."

"Good," said the inspector, "and what excuse then are we going to make to get them to come in like sheep,

one by one?"

"The best I can think of," replied Larose a little doubtfully, "is for you to ask Sir James to tell them on the quiet that very shortly we shan't be wanting them any more—say, perhaps, to-morrow or the day after—but that before they disperse you would like to make a note where they are likely to be found, if wanted, during the next fortnight or three weeks. He can ask them to slip away to you in the billiard-room,

one by one, so as not to cause any uneasiness among the ladies."

"And you?" asked the inspector.

"I'll be watching behind the curtain in the alcove," replied Larose, "and you must keep each of them talking for about half a minute. But be sure and not look at them when you are speaking for I want them to have every opportunity to stare round the room."

There was a knock upon the door and a constable

entered.

"Detective Naylor is here, sir," he said addressing the inspector, "and would like to speak to Mr. Larose."

"Show him in then," said the inspector and the eyes

of Larose gleamed.

"Now, we shall hear something," exclaimed the latter,

" or I shall be very much mistaken."

The face of Detective Naylor expressed complete

satisfaction, but he was sharp and terse of speech.

"I followed your instructions, sir," he said, looking at Larose, "and Postman G. J. Wilson reported at once that two cottages on his round, in Windmill Road in the old town, are in the course of being renovated with green paint, and upon the garden gate of one of them there has been recently affixed a notice, black letters upon a white background: 'Beware of the Dog.' The owner of the cottages is a Mrs. Salter."

Larose snapped his fingers together. "And I might have thought of that," he exclaimed disgustedly. "Of course they are Slim's, in Mrs. Salter's name." His face brightened and he nodded to the inspector. "And it means, as I thought, that Brother Slim has some very good reason for not wanting it known that the cottages

are his."

"One cottage is unoccupied," went on Detective Naylor, "the one with 'Beware of the Dog' on, but it appears to be furnished or at any rate it has blinds to the windows and they are drawn. The other is leased to a Thomas Provost who lives there with his wife who is an invalid. Provost works on the railway and has been in the same employment for a number of years."

"Is the unoccupied cottage to let?" asked Larose

sharply.

"I don't think so," replied Naylor, "for there is no board up and at the only place where I made enquiries—a little general shop some distance away—the woman behind the counter thought the owner was intending to come and live there. Otherwise it was her opinion the cottage would have been let to someone, for there is a nice bit of land belonging to it and such places are in good demand."

"And are you sure no one lives there?" asked Larose.

"So the woman said," replied Naylor, "but she told me a man comes occasionally to attend to the garden, the same man that'd been painting up the cottages lately."

"Did you get his description?" asked Larose eagerly.
"Naylor shook his head. "I didn't attempt to," he replied, "for until I knew your intentions, I didn't want to appear to be too curious. I just bought a packet of cigarettes and found out what I told you.'

"Hum!" remarked Larose thoughtfully. "Now that's funny Slim should be losing money because, from all I've seen of him, I should say he is most methodical and a keen business man." He nodded his head slowly.

"Yes, I think I should like to see inside that cottage." "Well, it would be quite easy," said Detective Naylor, "for the cottages are isolated and at the end of the road; and if you approached the unoccupied one from the back there's a thick plantation of trees that comes up within a few yards of the fence. It would be good cover and no one could see you from the road. The trees are on Colonel Trevor's land and quite half a mile from his house."

Larose made no comment for a few moments and then

he exclaimed briskly:

"Excellent, then we'll go there this afternoon. me here at two-thirty. Bring a tyre-lever, a large screw-driver and a big pair of pincers, also any old keys that you happen to have. In the meantime, put on a man to see if anyone goes into the cottage."
"Very good, sir," replied the man and then perceiving

there were no further orders for him, he saluted and left

the room.

"Housebreaking, Mr. Larose?" asked the inspector

dryly.

Larose smiled. "No, just a little friendly visit without going through the formality of asking the owner for the key." He rose to his feet. "But now if you don't mind we'll go up to the Court and get the business there over before lunch. I fancy somehow we shall not be wasting our time."

They drove up in the inspector's car and, turning into the drive, met Binks coming from the direction of the garage. He took in who they were at once and somewhat to Larose's surprise, held up his hand for them to

stop.

He looked rather flurried and his small, pig-like eyes

blinked from the one to the other of them intently.

"Beg pardon for stopping you, gentlemen," he said, "but I think there's something you ought to know. I've just been talking about it to Sir James." He paused a moment as if to impress them. "There were strangers yesterday evening here in the grounds."

"You saw them?" queried the inspector sternly.

"Oh, no," replied Binks hurriedly, "but directly I let the dogs out at midnight they picked up a trail and "he pointed with his hand—"they were off like a shot among those trees. I went after them, of course, but although I couldn't see anyone I was as sure as the dogs were that someone had been there."

"What time did you go to bed then?" asked the

inspector.

"A quarter to one," was the reply with no hesitation. "I happened to look at my watch just as I was switching off the light."

"And what were you carrying in your hand, Mr.

Binks," asked Larose very suavely, "when you followed

after the dogs. What weapon had you got?"

Instantly the expression upon the chauffeur's face became a hostile glare. "I hadn't got any weapon," he replied gruffly. "My hands are good enough for me."

"And you searched all through the grounds?" went on the detective most politely. "You went all round the Court?"

For just one second the chauffeur seemed to hesitate and then he replied with great energy: "Several times; not once, but three or four."

"And the dogs came with you?"

The chauffeur seemed on sure ground now and spoke as if he were telling the truth. "I had to drag them by their collars," he said. "I had to pull them away from those trees."

The conversation languished, and then the inspector, upon a nudge from Larose, let in the clutch and with a

curt nod to the chauffeur, drove on.

"A liar," was the comment of Larose, "and a very cunning one. He's only spoken to us because it probably came into his mind that those footprints of his in the flower-bed outside the billiard-room had been noticed by me and he had to have some explanation ready."
"What sort of thing was the butler hit with?" asked

the inspector. "Did Dr. Merryweather express any

opinion?"

"A small, blunt weapon," replied the detective, "and not too heavy, the doctor thought. And as the blow was not repeated, we were both of the same mind that injury—rather than actual murder—was the intention."
"Ah!" exclaimed the inspector. "Just a nasty

reminder perhaps to suggest to you that you'd better

clear out."

Arriving at the Court, they sought out Sir James, and the inspector explained what he wanted. An uneasy look at once came into the baronet's face.

"And I hope it doesn't mean, Mr. Larose," he said

quickly, "that you have definite hope of fastening the guilt upon one of us here?"

The detective was non-committal. "It means, sir, as Inspector Roberts has just told you," he replied, "that we can't expect your guests all to remain here in-definitely although our enquiries may still have to go on. Therefore, by to-morrow, or the day after at latest, they will be at liberty to leave, and Inspector Roberts has selected the billiard-room for the place of his last interview with them, as an earnest that we no longer require the room, and that it can be returned to its normal use forthwith." He smiled genially. "And you might inform your guests too that I shall not be present at the interviews to annoy them with any further questions."

The baronet left the room not looking too satisfied and, waiting a few moments, Larose jumped to his feet.

"Now, into the billiard-room, quick," he whispered, "and you sit at that table at the end. Appear bored as if the whole business were a useless formality to you, and give them every chance to turn their eyes about."

A couple of minutes later, and everything was staged for the scene that Larose had arranged. He himself was hidden behind the curtain in the alcove; and Inspector Roberts, with a very weary look upon his face, was sitting at the little table with a large sheet of paper spread out before him.

The Honourable Donald Culloden was the first of the men to appear, and he marched in stiffly, puffing fiercely

at a cigar.

"And it is only out of courtesy to Sir James Marley that we have consented to come," he announced pompously. "It was your business to approach us. We are not school children to be ordered about like this!" His face reddened in annoyance. "I don't know where I shall be during the next fortnight, but a telephone call to the Grenadier Club will always acquaint you with my whereabouts." He glared at the inspector. "Now, is that all?"

"And Mrs. Culloden?" asked the inspector quietly. Mr. Culloden looked angrier than ever. "She will be with me, of course."

"Thank you," said the inspector, making a note.

"Yes, that is all."

And then, one by one, they all came in, in turn, the inspector giving each a quick glance, and then looking down as he inscribed their addresses upon his paper. Gentry Wardle was the last to arrive and unlike all

the others, he seemed inclined to be talkative and

friendly.

"Well, Inspector," he said slowly, "it is very difficult for me to say exactly where I shall be, but they will always tell you at my flat in Greville Street. I may be in Scotland, I may be in the Isle of Wight "—he smiled—" or I may even be in prison." He pretended to look anxious. "That Gilbert Larose is a perfect devil of a fellow, and is keeping both his eyes upon me."

Inspector Roberts folded up the paper upon which he had written the addresses and put it in his pocket.

"Thank you, Mr. Wardle," he said coldly. "I've put you down as '10 Greville Street.' That is all I require." And he rose to his feet as if to intimate that the interview was over.

But Gentry Wardle showed no intention of leaving the room. He had lighted a cigarette, and was perched carelessly upon a corner of one of the billiard tables.

"You know, Inspector," he said solemnly, "I formed quite a wrong opinion of you at first, and I am revising it all now. You are not half the hard-hearted, cold man I thought you. You are much more simple and human."

"Oh! I am, am I?" exclaimed the inspector

gruffly.

"Yes," nodded Gentry Wardle, "and you are just the very type of man to find yourself in trouble one day "
—he paused impressively—" over some woman."

Inspector Roberts glared as if his eyes would start

out of his head, but the barrister went on sadly:

"You know, my practice lies largely in the matri-

monial courts, and in the course of my work I've seen hundreds such as you who've been led astray "—he shrugged his shoulders—" honest, simple-hearted fellows with no wrong in them and yet—yet they've crumpled on the instant when special circumstances have come their way. You must take care. An unscrupulous, designing tempter and you'll——"

"Thank you, Mr. Wardle," interrupted the inspector sharply, "but I'm quite capable of taking care of myself,

and I would remind you my time is valuable."
"Well," exclaimed the barrister, throwing out his hands, "I am only warning you as a friend. It's that Gilbert Larose I'm afraid of. He's letting you down."

"Mr. Larose!" ejaculated the inspector. "What

do you mean?"

Gentry Wardle looked very troubled. "Why, can't you see, he's warping your judgment and putting wrong ideas into your head. He's trying now to make you think, for one thing, that you can act."

The inspector looked intensely angry, and he stood glaring, with his mouth half open, as if he thought the

barrister had suddenly gone mad.

Gentry Wardle laughed mockingly, and all traces of his assumed anxiety for the welfare of the inspector

passed instantly away.
"Bah!" he sneered. "Your clever friend has overreached himself this time, and I spotted it at once-if the others didn't. He's staged a little drama here, for some purpose that I do not pretend to understand, and you were to be the actor-in-chief. We've all been marched in here, to pass under observation but, instead of playing your part properly, you've sat there with the expression of a servant girl caught in the act of kissing her young man "—he raised his voice in scorn—" and all the time, Larose, the great Larose, has been watching" —he sprang from the billiard table and darted over to the alcove—"from behind this curtain here."

With an exclamation of triumph, he swept the curtain

aside to find, however, that the alcove was empty.

A few minutes later the inspector found Larose in the hall in conversation with pretty Maud Winchester, and drawing him to one side, with a grin started to tell of the discomfiture of Gentry Wardle, but the detective

cut him short quickly.

"Oh, I slipped out through the other door," he explained, "directly he started his foolery. I guessed what he was up to, for I'd seen him take a long look at the curtain as he came in, and I'd got the door unlatched, ready." Larose lowered his voice to a whisper. "But don't trouble any more about him. That Dr. Merryweather's our man. He was all eyes upon the spot where Dane had fallen, and he was looking, too, for the bloodmarks upon the settee. The others stared all round the room, everywhere "—he hesitated for a moment— "except for Culloden who only glared at you." Larose shook his head. "It's inconceivable even to think it, but I am wondering now if there's anything on between that doctor and Slim. They are both criminals, I am sure, and the girl Yates has just told me Merryweather's spent more than half an hour this morning talking to Mrs. Salter in the housekeeper's room." He nodded to the inspector. "Well, it'll be luncheon here almost directly, and I'll see you at the station at half-past two."

Larose went into his bedroom and proceeded to tidy himself up, in a very meditative frame of mind. "But there's a lot to think out," ran his thoughts, "and it is hard to really disentangle what bears upon the main question, and what may have nothing to do with it at all." His brows wrinkled in perplexity. "Now, have I picked up two trails or only one? Merryweather executing his vengeance in that deathly silence in the billiard-room—and Slim, in conjunction with the chauffeur, and perhaps Mrs. Salter and the chauffeur's wife, engaged in some nefarious business that they are

most anxious should not see the light of day?"

His thoughts ran on. "And again, who the deuce could have been trying to unlock that door of the billiard-room this morning, and what on earth could they have

been wanting if they had got in? Was it old Mother Culloden trying to satisfy her morbid curiosity and perhaps obtain some bloody relic of the crime? That Yates girl says she heard her tell the other women last night that a clairvoyant, if he was only holding something directly connected with the murder in his hand, could call up everything that had happened and describe the murderer at once." He made a grimace. "Really, it is among educated people that one finds the worst cranks and fools of the world."

The luncheon was another cheerful meal and, as if in the knowledge of their impending freedom, most of the guests appeared to be in quite a happy frame of mind.

But two things happened that seemed to the detective significant and gave him considerable food for thought.

The first—during a lull in the conversation, Mrs. Culloden fixing him with her prominent eyes asked loudly:

"And like me, Mr. Larose, you didn't get much sleep

last night?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Larose as if very surprised, "but I slept very well."

A hush fell over the company and everyone looked

from the detective to Mrs. Culloden.

"But you were in the billiard-room for a long time," went on that lady impressively, "for nearly two hours from just after one. I couldn't sleep and was sitting by my window, and I saw the light there go up. I could see it through the ventilator, and it must have been the light over the fire-place because it was so dim."

Larose blushed guiltily, and Mrs. Culloden went on: "And what happened to the door? You were fumbling there for ever so long in the dark, but then just as I was getting back into bed, I heard you tiptoe past my door.

I am sure it was you."

Larose put a bold face on it and shook his head.

"But many things, Mrs. Culloden," he replied, "have happened in this house that we cannot explain." He looked her straight in the face. "I slept very well."

Mrs. Culloden compressed her lips tightly together as if she did not believe him, and a few minutes later the

general conversation was resumed.

Then the second thing—Larose suddenly surprised the usually calm and placid-faced Dr. Merryweather regarding him with a look in which intense contempt and enmity were blended. He, Larose was talking to Sir James Marley at the moment, and they were both smiling at a remark the former had just made. The baronet was in a genial mood and was unbending more than he had hitherto done since he had met the detective. Larose had dropped his serviette, and it was when stooping to recover it that he had met the doctor's gaze.

"By James!" he murmured, "but if I don't look out, I'll be victim number two; I should never have dreamed

he could look like that."

The meal over, he found the police car waiting for him, and was driven quickly to the police headquarters in the town, and twenty minutes later he was standing with Detective Naylor peering out from the edge of a thick wood.

"Those are the two cottages," announced the local detective, "and the one nearest to us is the empty

one."

"But are you sure it's empty?" asked Larose grimly, adjusting a small pair of binoculars. "We shall look

big fools if there's anyone in it."

Detective Naylor took out his watch. "It is now exactly two-forty-seven," he said, "and at two-fifty the man who has been watching the road since just before midday, will ride by on a bicycle. If he has seen no one about, he will stop just opposite to us and blow up one of his tyres. If he doesn't stop, we are to meet him at the end of the road, in ten minutes."

Larose searched the cottage with his glasses. "Well, we must risk someone having been in the place all day," he said, "but I don't think, with those drawn blinds, it's

at all likely."

The cottage was of two stories, and built solidly of

stone. It appeared to consist only of four rooms, and

the windows were small and narrow.

Barely three minutes went by before a man on a bicycle appeared in sight. When just opposite the cottage, he dismounted and pumped vigorously for a few moments at his back tyre. Then, without glancing in the direction of the cottage, he mounted again and rode off.

"Now," said Larose smiling, "we'll see what we can find. From the look of it we ought to be inside in two

minutes."

They scrambled quickly over the fence and approached the back door. It was stout and strong and was swung a good six inches within the stone walls.

Larose put the whole weight of his shoulder against

it, but it did not move a hair's breadth.

"Bolted, top and bottom," he remarked with a frown, and of solid oak. Looks fairly new to me. Let's

try the windows. It should be fairly easy there."

But he whistled when he came to examine the windows. "Whew!" he exclaimed delightedly, as he peered into the front one, "but we're on something here, sure. Look at those bolts and safety catches—the very best and all new, too. Now they weren't put on except for some very special reason." He tapped on one of the panes and whistled again. "Thick—almost plate glass, and it's been put on from inside. No chance of picking the putty away and prizing the whole pane out."

He thought for a moment. "Now what about that front door? It can't be bolted, and it's just possible the lock may be an old one, although, bearing in mind the catches on the windows, I hardly think so." He peeped round the corner of the cottage. "Now, there's no one about in the road and I guess I'll risk it. Give me one of those bits of wire and the pincers and I'll see if our

luck's in."

He disappeared round the cottage, but was back again almost in an instant.

"Not a bit of good," he said. He nodded his head

significantly. "The lock's a new Yale one and the door's of thick oak too.

Detective Naylor pointed to the upper windows. "What about them?" he asked. "Those bolts look

just ordinary ones to me."

"So they are," commented Larose cheerfully, "and I noticed a hurdle lying just the other side of the fence, so that if you hold it lengthways against the wall, I'll climb up and see what I can do with the screwdriver."

Two minutes later there was a sharp snap and then the window went up, and Larose pushed aside the blind

and climbed into the room.

"But I've broken the bolt," he exclaimed showing his head again, "it was almost rusted through. Still it doesn't matter," he went on, "the room's quite unfurnished and I don't suppose anyone comes here

often. Now up you come and I'll pull you in."

The two upper rooms were quite empty and descending to the ground floor by the narrow stairs, they found the condition almost the same. Bare boards everywhere, no furniture or utensils in the kitchen and in the front room, a camp stretcher, a small deal table, a chair and two long, wooden crates. By the fire-place there was a high cupboard let deeply into the wall.

This last room was not untidy, and there was no smell of dust about. It was evidently swept occasionally, for there was a house broom in the corner, and a quantity of cigarette-butts in the fire-place had all been pushed neatly to one corner. There was a thick, heavy curtain

that could be pulled across the window.

All the rooms were in semi-darkness for the drawn blinds fitted well, and were of good quality stout linen.

For quite a long time the two detectives stood upon the threshold of what was evidently the living-room and regarded everything intently. Their eyes darted from the cupboard to the packing-cases, and the stretcher, the table, the chair and then back to the cupboard again.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Larose?" asked Naylor

presently, at last breaking the silence.

"Everything is here for a purpose," replied Larose slowly, "and the sinister thing to my mind is that thick curtain, for it means that what work is done here is done secretly at night."

He walked across the room to the cupboard and

laughed softly.

"Look at that lock, Mr. Naylor. You could pick it with a bent pin." He nodded his head. "Yes, anyone breaking into the cottage was meant to open this cupboard"—his face hardened, and his eyes roved round the room—"to distract attention from something hidden somewhere else." He laughed again. "Yes, just fancy—after breaking those plate glass windows or forcing that good Yale lock, all that there is to keep anyone from the good things of this cottage is this trumpery one and sixpenny contrivance here." He began bending a piece of stout wire. "Still, we'll have a look at what's inside anyhow."

The cupboard was soon opened and its contents exposed to view. There was nothing that seemed to suggest anything of nefarious character. Scattered about upon the four shelves were—a bottle of whisky, half empty, two tumblers, a box of cigarettes, some biscuits in a tin, a candle in an enamel candle-stick, a number of unfolded sheets of thick brown paper, and a

large ball of thick string.

Well, we can't hang anybody on these," remarked Larose and he at once proceeded to tap most methodically all round the back and sides of the cupboard for any hollow sound. But everything was solid as a rock and after a minute or two, closing and relocking the cupboard with his piece of wire, he turned and looked thoughtfully round the room.

A long silence followed and then Detective Naylor coughed diffidently. "But what do you expect to find here, Mr. Larose?" he asked. "What have we really come here for?"

Larose awoke instantly from his reverie and proceeded to regard his companion in a most friendly way. "I don't really know"—he looked round the room again—"but I am suspicious—very suspicious—and the more I go into that butler's affairs, the more suspicious I become." He took out his cigarette-case and handed it across. "It'll be quite safe to smoke and perhaps it'll clear our minds a bit. Now, you can give me your advice and tell me what you think."

Detective Naylor flushed with pleasure. He knew in what estimation Larose was held at headquarters, and now the great man was asking him for his opinion.

Larose went on speaking very slowly: "You see, this is the problem. Here at the Court in an atmosphere of dreadful crime, and with suspicions directed against almost everyone, we uncover a man who is deliberately lying to us. His lies certainly do not appear upon the surface to have anything directly to do with the matter we are investigating, but he must be lying because he undoubtedly has some guilty secret to hide. Well, he has denied the existence of this cottage, and when we come here what do we find?" The Australian lowered his voice impressively. "Elaborate precautions taken that no one shall break in, and precautions out of all proportion to the value of anything that we can see is here." He looked round the room. "Then there is this thick curtain, not provided to prevent anyone seeing in, for the thick blinds would be sufficient for that, but put up undoubtedly so that no passers-by in the road shall notice when a light is burning here at night."

He turned solemnly to his companion. "Now what

does it mean, I ask you? What does it all mean?"

Detective Naylor weighed his words carefully. "I was present when Inspector Roberts was questioning Slim," he replied, "and it seemed to me that the butler was speaking the truth then. He was not at all conciliatory in his answers and he got quite angry at times. I don't think he was hiding anything there."

"Nor I either," said Larose quickly, "but what about

this business here?"

"He must be coming here at night," replied Naylor, " or else have an interest in something that goes on here at night. His secret may be shared by someone else."

"But that would not explain those safeguarded windows and that new Yale lock," snapped Larose quickly. "They can only mean that he's afraid of someone entering here when the place is empty and that implies"—he held Naylor with his eyes—"that something is hidden here."

"I suppose it does," admitted Naylor after a pause,

" and so-

"We're wasting time," broke in Larose impatiently. "We will get a move on at once and go over every inch

of the place."

Then for an hour and more the two detectives were engaged upon a most intensive search. They looked everywhere for a loose board in the floorings and the wainscotting, and they tapped everywhere for hollow sounds. They examined the fire-places and they craned their heads up the chimneys, and they even went to the extent of prizing out the large bowl of the copper. But it was all to no purpose and, hot and grimy, they stood up and brushed the dust from their clothes.

"We're beat," said Larose glumly, "there's nothing to be found here."

And then at that very moment they heard the click of the garden gate, followed by the sound of footsteps coming quickly up the gravel path.

"We're trapped," exclaimed Larose hoarsely, and he dashed over to the window and lifted up the corner of the

blind.

"A woman," he whispered tensely, "and it's the chauffeur's wife. Quick, into the kitchen," he went on. "The door was open when we came in and we'll stand behind it."

They tiptoed into the kitchen and flattened themselves

against the wall.

"It's damned awkward," whispered Larose, "for we shan't be able to see anything from here." He made a grimace. "Now hold your breath and trust to luck. Anything may happen now."

The footsteps approached the front door and, without

a second's pause, the key thrust into the lock.
"Good," ran Larose's thoughts, "she's nervous or in a hurry and was holding the key ready. We may escape

yet."

They heard the door open and the sound of hurried breathing and then the door was very quietly shut. Then they heard footsteps crossing the room and the noise of a key being inserted in another lock.
"The cupboard!" murmured Larose, "but I daren't

look for she'll be directly facing us now."

They heard the chink of glass and then the bump of a bottle being put down. Then a sort of grating noise followed and the two detectives stopped breathing and could almost hear the beating of their hearts.

Nothing happened for a few moments. Then came a rustling followed at a very short interval by the grating sound again. Then the clink of the glass again, another

thump—and the key was returned in the lock.

"Now for it," whispered Naylor licking his lips with a dry tongue. "She'll come in here next."

Three or four seconds of intense expectation ensued and then, almost before they had had time to realize what was happening, the front door was opened and closed softly, and they heard footsteps retreating down the gravel path.

"She's gone," ejaculated Larose numbly, "and, perhaps, taken what we want with her." And with a lightning jump he was at the window and lifting up the

blind again.

"Well, it's nothing big, if she has," he went on quickly, "for she's got both her arms swinging and her hands are empty." He rapped out like a shot from a gun: "Where's the nearest telephone?"

"A quarter of a mile from here," replied Naylor, "at

the end of the road."

"Well, if we don't find out within three minutes,"

scowled Larose, "what that woman came for, I'll trail her—she turned up the road to the right—and you'll phone for her to be stopped before she goes into the lodge, and taken to the station and searched."

"All right," answered Naylor, "and you'll trail her easily enough. She can't walk fast with those high heels of hers. Didn't you hear them tapping on the

floor?"

But Larose made no reply to his question. "Now for the cupboard again," he jerked out, "and we'll take exactly three minutes and no more."

The cupboard was opened almost as quickly as the chauffeur's wife had done it with the key, and then with

gaping mouths, the detectives glared inside.

Their faces fell in disappointment, for it required only the briefest of inspections to perceive that everything was exactly as it had been before. Nothing had been taken and nothing new put there.

"She had a drink," growled Naylor, "only that."

"No, no," frowned Larose, "the glasses are dry." And time after time his eyes fell thoughtfully upon every

article that the cupboard contained.

Then suddenly he thrust his whole head and shoulders into the cupboard and began to sniff violently. "Do you smell anything?" he asked sharply and with an excited catch in his voice. "Because if you don't, I do, and I got a suspicion of it just now too as we were crossing the room. She brought it in with her. Do you smell it?"

"Yes, camphor—or menthol," ejaculated Naylor after

a moment, "and it's quite strong."

Larose swiftly shifted the tumblers and bottle of whisky from the middle shelf. "These are what she was moving," he exclaimed, "and so I'll swear this shelf comes out."

With everything clear, he seized hold of the shelf and began pulling and shaking violently. For a moment nothing happened, and then it suddenly slid away from the cupboard, so easily that he would have fallen backwards if Naylor had not caught him. Part of the back of the cupboard came out with the shelf. It had a oneinch-thick slab of cement clamped on to it and it left

behind a gaping square hole in the thick wall.

Larose thrust in his arm and brought out a small, soft, brown paper parcel, tied loosely round with string. He opened it quickly and held up to the astounded gaze of Detective Naylor a beautiful light brown sable choker. Two moth balls dropped upon the floor.

"That is what the lady put in just now," he exclaimed, "and no doubt we shall find she had some good reason

for hiding it. A most expensive piece of fur!"
"But see what else is in there," almost shouted Naylor in great excitement. "Strike a match, man, quick."

Larose smiled grimly at the peremptory way in which he was being addressed, and thrusting in his arm again, this time brought out a heavy object wrapped round many times in what looked like a piece of a torn curtain.

Naylor snatched it out of his hand and tearing at the covering, in a few seconds exposed to view a small oil painting about eighteen inches square in an old-fashioned, heavy gilt frame. The painting depicted a pastoral scene with a windmill, and some cattle grazing in a deep green meadow by a very silvered stretch of water. Upon the frame was a small brass plate and on the plate was inscribed:

" J. B. C. Corot. 1835."

The detective's hands shook and his lips quivered; but with great care, and great reverence he placed the picture in safety upon the small table by the window,

and then he turned shakily to Larose.

"A genuine Corot, Mr. Larose," he said huskily, "and valued at fifteen thousand pounds"—his voice hardened to cold policeman-like tones—"and stolen last January from the collection of Lord Rainer at Hailsham Castle." His face broke into a delighted smile. "And that sable choker no doubt belongs to Mrs. Bain. One was taken when the admiral's house

was broken into last month."

With an effort Larose suppressed the exultation that he felt. "Splendid," he said; "I knew friend Slim was up to no good." He turned back to the cupboard. "And now we'll see what other treasures we can find."

But beyond a pair of silver candle-sticks which Detective Naylor thought he remembered as having been stolen from the vicar of East Dean, there was nothing more to be retrieved.

The excitement of the discoveries over, Larose took

charge again at once.

"We'll make a parcel of those things," he said, " and get back quickly to the station. Where'll your assistant be now?"

"Not far away," replied Naylor. "He was to wait at the Downs Hotel until we picked him up." The detective turned back a corner of the blind. "I think it will be quite safe now if we go out by the front way. It will save us over a mile."

Larose hesitated a moment. "All right," he said,

"we'll risk it for we can't afford to lose any time."

But he regretted his decision before even two minutes had passed, for, gaining the road through the garden gate, they had not gone fifty yards when they met a man upon a bicycle, who stared at them very hard.

He was riding very slowly for one of his hands was

bandaged and the bandage was stained with blood.

CHAPTER XI

SETTING, THE TRAP

BUT we must wait, sir," insisted Larose when, half an hour later, he had finished telling the delighted inspector of the discoveries they had made at the cottage, "for, remember, we have nothing definite as yet against Slim and it is really only the chauffeur, so far, who is implicated through his wife. Besides"—and he spoke very thoughtfully—"I am more puzzled than ever now about that killing of Captain Dane."

"Well, I'm not puzzled at all," exclaimed the inspector instantly. "I give my vote now most emphatically to Slim for it is not possible to me we can have stumbled upon two distinct sets of criminals, operating independently, but at the same time, up at the Court. We know positively now that there is a burglar under that roof and we know equally as positively that there is a murderer, too, then what is more probable than that they should be both one and the same person?"

Larose shook his head. "But burglary and murder rarely overlap, Mr. Roberts, and no one knows that better than you. The burglar is nearly always a man of

peace and never resorts to murder at any cost."

"Well, the burglar did in this instance," returned the inspector confidently. "I feel sure of it." He bowed smilingly to Larose. "So, with the greatest respect to your judgment and the greatest admiration for you, as the man who never fails—I think, Mr. Larose, we can drop Dr. Merryweather and concentrate on Slim. We ought to arrest him, and that housekeeper and Binks

and his wife, at once."

"A weak move, sir," exclaimed Larose sharply, "and one that will embarrass me a lot." He spoke in a more gentle tone. "There is not the slightest need to hurry about arresting anybody for these burglaries for, until one of the gang goes into the cottage and discovers we have been there, they will have no idea that everything is not all right. They will not be unduly upon their guard, and we shall be in the happy position of being able to watch them, when they do not even know they are suspected."

"And if they do visit the cottage," asked the inspector,

" what then?"

"They must be arrested, of course," replied Larose. "The cottage must never be left empty now. Put in two men straight away, with orders to detain anyone who opens the door." He smiled at the inspector. "You see, how do we know that Slim and Binks and the two women are the only people involved? The gang may comprise others, of whose very existence, up to now, we have no idea. That cottage may trap new birds."

"All right," sighed the inspector. "It shall be done as you say." He nodded his head. "After the services you have already rendered, I should be a fool not to do

everything you suggest."

"But I am very worried," said Larose confidingly, and, as if anxious to smooth over the little friction that had occurred, "for I see now I have made one bad mistake."

"What mistake?" exclaimed the inspector quickly.

"What have you done?"

"Asked you to throw open the billiard-room again," replied Larose, "and so given Dr. Merryweather the opportunity to get in there. I realize now that he's been after that opportunity ever since you locked the doors."

"How do you know that?" asked the inspector

frowning.

"The day after the murder," replied Larose very solemnly, "the key to the dining-room door-the lock there is of the same very ordinary type as is on the billiardroom door-was missing. Merryweather had taken it and he started at once to try and make it fit the billiardroom door. He went searching among the tools in the garage until he found the kind of file that he wanted. Then, when I was in the billiard-room last night, it was he who was trying to unlock the door. I am positive of it because when, a few minutes later, I ran up to his bedroom to fetch him to come down to Slim, I remember, now, getting a strong whiff of oil when he came out. Undoubtedly he had been oiling the key as he filed."
"Then if you know all this," asked the inspector

sharply, "why did you suggest that farce this morning

and allow them to have the room back?"

"But I didn't realize it until later, when at lunch today," replied Larose sadly. "I had been thinking all along it was that cranky Culloden woman who had been trying to get in. I believe she was hankering after some bloody relic of the dead man, some strands of stained rug or something like that, to use for what she calls her clairvoyant purposes, and I had dismissed the incident as being of no particular account. But at lunch she startled me a lot by suddenly accusing me, in front of everyone, of having been in the billiard-room for over two hours during the night. She said that from her bedroom window she had seen a light shining out through the ventilator above the billiard-room, then she had heard me fumbling with the lock and, finally, shuffle past her door to my room." The detective sighed. "I am quite sure she was not making it up, but am convinced she was speaking the truth. It was Merryweather whom she had heard passing her door."

"Hum!" remarked the inspector. "Then if Merryweather had wanted to get into the billiard-room, he

"Ten minutes before lunch," interrupted Larose, "and he probably went there, for he was the last to come in to the meal."

"But what could he have wanted?" asked the in-

spector.

"I don't know," replied Larose, "and that's what worries me "-he thumped his fist upon the desk-" and that too is what urges me to make you wait, for I want to link up Merryweather with Slim and Co."

"All right," said the inspector, "you're going to have your way." He smiled grimly. "Now I've news for you. There's a colleague waiting for you up at the Court. That jig-saw, cranky Naughton Jones is there" -his lips curled to a sneer-"the greatest private detective of the age."

Larose made a grimace. "Good," he exclaimed, "then I shall get some very sage advice." He smiled. "I know him and he's not a bad sort, and sometimes

he makes some very shrewd guesses."
"Well," said the inspector, "he came in here like a whirlwind just after you had gone, and he'd got a letter from the Home Office instructing me to supply him with all the information that he required. He went through the photographs in a couple of minutes/; called, like you did, for the dead man's clothes, and scowled when I told him we had not preserved the ashes in the grate. Then he asked if he would find you up at the Court now, and when I replied I didn't know he gave me a nasty look and rushed out with his coat-tails flying. He had kept a taxi waiting outside, in which he had come down from London."

"Well, I'll be off at once," replied Larose rising from his chair, "and I hope to have some more news by to-morrow. Ring me if you've anything to tell me. Betty Yates answers the phone now and she can be relied upon to fetch me at once." He turned to leave the room and then stopped suddenly. "I should think if you put two men in that cottage it would be quite sufficient for, although we may hope for it, it'll be

extraordinary if any other members of the gang go near the place for a while. No doubt Binks's wife only took that sable up there this afternoon because it had suddenly dawned upon her husband that the lodge might be searched and that bit of fur would be hard to explain."

"All right," nodded the inspector, "two men will go up at once, but I'm afraid, as you are, that it'll be only

a rest cure for them."

The evening was evidently going to be a wet one, and Larose was driven back to the Court through a mist of drizzling rain. Turning into the big lounge hall, he paused for a moment to regard those assembled there and, unconsciously, he frowned as a little scene at the

far end caught his eye.

Sir James Marley, seated next to his wife, was in the centre of a little group of chairs. He was relating something, or telling some story, because the faces of all in his immediate vicinity were turned in his direction. He was smiling as he was speaking to his wife, and she, with her beautifully formed lips slightly parted, was regarding him with the rapt look of a woman in love. Near by Dr. Merryweather was standing, and it was the expression on the latter's face that had made the detective frown.

The doctor looked so kind and gentle, and turning suddenly from the baronet to regard Lady Marley, his whole expression became one of great and wistful tenderness as if he were now gazing upon the being he loved best in all the world.

"Yes," murmured the detective, "as the Brand woman said, he's taken in that direction, too "—he nodded his head grimly—"but that's not the kind of look I got from him at lunch to-day, for if ever I saw hate, I saw it then."

He entered the hall, and Lady Marley, catching sight of

him, beckoned with an imperious wave of her hand.

"There's a friend of yours here, Mr. Larose," she exclaimed smilingly when he approached, "Mr. Naughton Jones, and he wants to see you at once for he

can't stay long." She rose from her chair. "He's in

the library and I'll take you to him."

Dr. Merryweather made way to let her pass. His expression was all amiability, too, and he wagged his

finger in the most friendly fashion at the detective.

"And don't you give him all your thunder, young man," he warned smilingly. "Keep the credit of your discoveries for yourself, and don't let the amateur beat the professional at his own game." He laughed as if he were greatly amused. "You're the man who never fails, remember."

"Now, what the deuce does that mean?" thought Larose as he followed Lady Marley out of the hall. "He doesn't want me to tell old Jones anything. That's it.

He's afraid of two heads being better than one."

Lady Marley was content to usher Larose into the library and then seeing the detective advance to shake hands with Naughton Jones, she closed the door and left them together.

The renowned amateur investigator, if a little patronizing, was certainly most cordial in his greeting.

"And I haven't seen you, Mr. Larose," he smiled, "since that day when we got Arnold Texworthy's number put up in the frame, as a starter in the Scaffold Stakes."

"No, Mr. Jones," replied Larose most respectfully, but although we've not met, I've often heard of what you are doing and the wonderful successes you have."

"Experience, my boy," laughed Naughton Jones,
"just experience and a few white hairs. Well, when are
you going back to Australia to your family? Oh, I'm
very sorry; I forgot you were a widower. And so you
like England do you? Well, it's not by any means a bad
place, but"—and the great investigator shook his head
—"there's a lot of crime about and, as far as I am concerned, I can't keep pace with it. The pot is always
boiling over." He looked very worried. "I have only
come down to-day to oblige my friend, Mr. Gentry
Wardle and because"—he coughed slightly—"the cheque
that they sent in advance was a very handsome one."

"Very nice," smiled Larose, "and I'm sure you'll earn it."

"But I told them most definitely that I could only stop a few hours at most," went on Naughton Jones, "and they must be content with that, for I had six cases already on my hands." He ticked them off on his fingers. "Lady Flapperty's missing pearls—the mystery of the curate who disappeared last month from Paignton—Lord Bosher's broken flower-pots—that murder of the fishmonger in Tewkesbury and—well, well, two investigations the exact nature of which I cannot specify."

"But it must be very distracting having so much on

your mind," commented Larose politely.

"It is, it is," agreed Naughton Jones, "but still, you see, I survive and my powers of observation, I assure you, were never keener." He smiled slyly. "You still carry that awful pistol about with you, for the bulge in your hip-pocket spoils the crease in your right trouser leg—you have just come from somewhere near the Downs, for there is a lot of chalk upon your boots—you have been investigating a barn or more probably an empty house, for your clothes want a good brushing and there is a cobweb on your right sleeve—and lastly, that suit you are wearing has been put away and only taken out again very recently, for the smell of moth balls still adheres to it." Naughton Jones looked very pleased with himself. "Now am I not right?"

Larose flushed and grinned at the same time. "I'm glad I've done nothing much wrong, Mr. Jones," he replied, "or I should be afraid to be in the same

hemisphere with you."

Naughton Jones bowed at the compliment and then suddenly the smile died from his face, he drew himself up stiffly and, dropping his voice to a low tone, said quickly:

"But about this murder here, I have not time, as I have told you, to follow it up, but I've made a few discoveries and you shall have the benefit of them." He frowned at Larose. "But don't think because I've only been here

for about three hours that my conclusions are illconsidered and without weight behind them." He nodded his head. "I've done a lot of work, and I've interviewed everyone, and that rather agreeable-looking parlourmaid has taken me over the whole house for a tour of inspection. In the grounds, my guide and counsellor was the pugilistic chauffeur, and these are my conclusions."

He stared solemnly at Larose. "Well, to begin with—I don't like that cook or that butler. They are both liars and they are mother and son, I believe. They've got the same shaped lobes to their ears and they both lower their eyes in the same manner." He pursed up his lips. "At any rate, if they are not mother and son they are closely related. They deny it, of course, but I am convinced she's taking off her age and he is putting on his." He nodded to the Australian. "Make some enquiries about them at once."

Larose took out his cigarette-case and offered Naughton Jones a cigarette. He had to do something to hide his annoyance, and the disgust he was now feeling

with himself.

"Oh, but I'm a poor thing," he murmured under his breath, "and this galoot here with all his pomposity is a better man than I. Of course, that's what made me think I'd seen her before. She's his mother and his real Christian name is William."

Naughton Jones went on. "This murder was a crime of passion," he snapped, "and it had nothing at all to do with the robbing of those notes. Probably they were thrown on to the fire at once." He shook his finger reprovingly at Larose. "You did wrong, sir, not to have those ashes examined by an expert."

"But it would have been useless, Mr. Jones," replied the nettled Australian. "The fire had been a big one and in any case no trace of the paper would have been found."

"Certainly there might not have been," granted Naughton Jones condescendingly, "but still as a matter

of routine it ought to have been done." He took a paper out of his pocket. "Now for some notes I have made as to the probable murderer."

He hesitated and, puckering up his eyes, scowled at the paper as if he could not now read what he had written. "Well, at any rate," he continued after a moment, thrusting it back into his pocket, "I have told you this was a crime of passion and my reasons for determining so are these. Captain Dane was an objectionable beast and he chased women as some men chase beetles or butterflies. He had an evil reputation that preceded him here, and in consequence the females fell for him at once. I have conversed with all of them, and could gather instantly the impression he had made. They sighed and averted their eyes, and, undoubtedly, each one thought she had been the particular creature whom he had admired most.

The great man paused to puff meditatively at his cigarette, and the stern lines of his face relaxed. He

smiled with great good humour.

"You must have noticed yourself, Mr. Larose," he went on, "that women always take to a bad man and the reason, I believe, is because civilization has touched and lifted them far less than it has done us. It is the function of maternity that has kept them down. He threw out his hand and spoke grandiloquently like a professor addressing his class. They are nearer the savage ages when success in violence marked the great man and they respond the more readily to the brute instincts of the despoiler who would take-where he can."

"But the probable murderer, Mr. Jones," broke in Larose quickly, when for a moment Naughton Jones had paused to take breath, "you have not mentioned him yet."

"Ah, no," replied Jones with a frown, "I see, I was digressing." He spoke in quick, decisive tones. "Well, there are five people here who may possibly have done it. Mind you," he added quickly, "I only say possibly, for I have no definite suspicions about any of them. All I contend is that they alone possess the necessary temperaments to have carried out such a crime."

He paused a moment, and then rapped out sharply: "I name my friend, Gentry Wardle first, then Colonel Mead, then Rainey, the actor fellow, and then two of the women, Lady Sylvia Drews, and the journalist Felicia Brand."

"Your friend, Gentry Wardle!" ejaculated Larose.

"The man who brought you down here!"

"Certainly," replied Jones calmly, "and he is the most likely of them all." He smiled with grave dignity. "Friendship does not blunt the keenness of my perceptions and besides, I was brought down here as a professional detective and in no way as a friend. It was a syndicate of five that provided that cheque and in fairness to all the five I shall provide the best service that I can."

"And what makes you suggest Wardle?" asked Larose when he had in part recovered from his surprise.

"I have known him for five years," was the reply; "he is a man of ruthless and determined disposition, he is hasty and he will stand no nonsense from anyone. He is also by a long way the best poker player I have ever met and he can put up a big bluff with anyone." Jones smiled dryly. "I thought of that directly he mentioned that it was he who had suggested calling me down."
"But the motive," asked Larose. "What motive

had he got?"

Naughton Jones shrugged his shoulders. "The same one that all the men might have had. Dane had been trying to become too familiar with one of their women."

"And Colonel Mead?" asked the puzzled Larose.

"There's nothing of a killer about him, to me."

"On the contrary," replied Jones, "Colonel Mead, as I happen to know, has had a very distinguished military career and was the hero once of a very thrilling episode in the Khyber Pass, when, single-handed, he disposed of six men. He is a man of bull-dog courage. He was the only friend Dane had here and in a way, therefore, may have considered that the latter's actions would be reflecting upon him, so if Dane had been misconducting

himself, he may have reprimanded him and, a quarrel ensuing, quite feasibly he may have struck that blow."

"And Rainey?" asked Larose, trying hard to winnow

out the corn from the chaff.

Jones shook his head. "A reckless and devil-may-care fellow, and in love with the Winchester girl. Dane, I understand from one of the maids, was making violent advances in that direction and was certainly once seen holding her hand, and so what is more possible, therefore,

than the midnight quarrel and that blow?"

Larose made no comment and Jones went on: "As for the two women, Drews and Brand, they look the only really highly passionate and bad-tempered ones here, and, according to that same informant again, they both showed signs of being intensely jealous when the captain was paying attention to anyone else." He sighed. "From the experience of a life's work among all classes of breakers of the law, I regard jealousy as one of the most prolific causes of violence and bloodshed.

Larose nodded as if in complete agreement.

"But what do you think of that doctor here?" he

asked.

"A most charming and cultured man," replied Naughton Jones instantly, "and of all these guests here, I think I am inclined to like him best." He appeared to consider for a moment and then shook his head. "But I don't say he wouldn't poison you with a germ if he believed it necessary, although"—and his face brightened—"I'm sure he'd be very nice about it and provide for your widow afterwards. He's a man of strong character but he's very kind-hearted."

"Well, thank you very much," said Larose with a smile. "You've given me some very useful points and

I'm greatly obliged to you.

"Not at all, Mr. Larose, not at all," replied Naughton Jones smiling back, "very pleased to help you, I am sure, and my only regret is that I can't stay to see it out." He laid his hand upon Larose's arm. "Now, would you

like me to go with you into the billiard-room and see if I can pick up anything for you there? I gave it only a

very quick glance over just now."

"Oh, well, not in the billiard-room," replied Larose hastily, "but I'd like you, if you would, to come up to the dead man's bedroom and go through his things with me there. I may have missed something."

They spent half an hour upstairs and Larose tendered respectful thanks for the opinions given him, then the great wizard of Dover Street took out his watch and

frowned.

"They did ask me to stay to dinner," he said as if considering, "but that matter of Lady Flapperty's pearls is most urgent and I hardly think—"

"We had an excellent dinner last night," said Larose softly, "and the burgundy was delicious. Chambertin

eighteen-ninety-four, if I remember rightly."

And so the great Naughton Jones made one of an appreciative party that night at dinner, and he saw to it, from the first moment when he sat down, that his

presence should be both seen and felt.

He showed no undue modesty by abstaining from the expression of most decided opinions upon every subject that came up for discussion and, as the rich food and good wine enlivened his spirits, he was ready with information for everyone and he spread himself out like a lordly peacock displaying his tail.

He knew more about the Great War than Sir James Marley; his knowledge of law was profounder far than that of Gentry Wardle; he told the Honourable Donald Culloden a lot about Scotland and he informed Colonel

Mead of many things regarding the pedigree of a certain

racehorse which that gentleman happened to own.

"But are you married, Mr. Jones?" asked Mrs. Culloden at last, seizing an opportunity when he paused for a moment to quaff from his third glass of burgundy.

He put down the glass and laughed. "Yes, very

much so," he replied.

"And have you any children then?" pursued Mrs.

Culloden.

His face became grave at once and he regarded her very solemnly. "Madam," he said, "I have many children and more are continually being born to me, in all parts of the world."

Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Culloden looking very

shocked. "I am very surprised."

"They must be a considerable source of expense to you then, Mr. Jones," called out Gentry Wardle with his

eyes twinkling.

"They are, they are," replied Naughton Jones. He sighed heavily. "But, alas, the mortality among them is very high." He turned back quickly to Mrs. Culloden. "Madam," he smiled, "I am wedded to my profession only, and my children"—he paused a moment—" are the law-breakers of the world."

The dinner came to an end at last and Larose saw Naughton Jones to the taxicab that, all the time, had been waiting in the drive. They shook hands and then suddenly Jones bent down and hissed into the

Australian's ear:

"I amplify my opinions," he said, "and add another name to the list." He gripped Larose by the arm. "Beware of that doctor fellow. He was watching you the whole evening, and I didn't like the look in his eyes. It boded no good for you, I am sure," and then with a wave of his hand he jumped into the taxi and was driven swiftly away.

Returning to the Court, Larose asked Sir James to

give him a few minutes alone.

"I am very sorry to trouble you to-night," he said,

noting the annoyance upon the baronet's face, "but

it is most important and cannot be put off."

"In the library, then," said Sir James sharply, "and don't, please, keep me longer from my guests than you

can help."

Larose rapped out his first question instantly. "And it is within your own personal knowledge," he asked, "that Mrs. Salter has been in your family for more than twenty years?" And when the baronet nodded curtly, he added: "Then you remember her when you were a boy?"

Sir James looked annoyed. "No," he replied with a frown, "I had never seen her until she came here as housekeeper, when I bought the Court, a little over two

years ago.'

"Never seen her!" exclaimed Larose, his eyes dilating in surprise." You had never seen her until two years ago, and yet you know she has been in the family for twenty

years?"

"The explanation is simple," said Sir James coldly. "I had not visited my uncle, Sir Julian Marley, with whom Mrs. Salter was in service, for a period of time considerably longer than twenty years, and in consequence, had not been brought in contact with any members of his domestic staff."

"Then have you only Mrs. Salter's word," gasped Larose, "that she had served your uncle for over twenty

years?"

"On the contrary," replied Sir James, "she has been well known to my uncle's solicitors, during all that time."

"And will they vouch for the fact," asked Larose quickly, "that she was with Sir Julian for over twenty

years?"

"Certainly," replied Sir James. He looked rather amused. "There is no mystery about it, Mr. Larose—it's like this. At the time I came into the baronetcy, four years ago, I was living in South Africa, but acting upon my instructions, my solicitors disposed of the Yorkshire property where my uncle had been residing

and dismissed the staff. Then, when two years ago I returned to England and bought this place, through those same solicitors, I re-engaged Mrs. Salter who had served my uncle for so long, as well."

"And Slim" asked Larose with a stony expression on his face, "did they also re-engage him?"

The baronet hesitated. "I think so," he replied, "but I am hardly sure." He thought hard for a moment, and then his face clouded. "No-o, I rather think it was through Mrs. Salter that I got Slim's address. My solicitors did not know where he had gone."

"Then you had never seen Slim before he came here?"

asked the detective.

"No," replied Sir James, "but I had heard a lot about him."

"What had you heard?" asked Larose.

"That he had been the right hand of my uncle, and that he was an honest, faithful and trustworthy servant, and could be depended upon always." The baronet's voice hardened defiantly. "And I would give him the same character now."

"And since he came here," asked Larose, "has any

member of that firm of solicitors seen him?"

Sir James thought again. "Not that I know of," he replied, "for none of the firm has been down here.

"Then it all amounts to this," said Larose slowly. "Only Mrs. Salter is in a position to know with any certainty that the Slim of Sir James Marley is the Slim of

the deceased Sir Julian."

"In the same way," added the baronet quickly, "that only the Gilbert Larose now standing before me knows whether he is the Gilbert Larose sent down by Scotland Yard."

"But Naughton Jones knew me," said Larose, "and

there was corroboration then."

"Oh! I beg your pardon," exclaimed Sir James. "I had forgotten that." He smiled sarcastically.

"Another conspiracy, perhaps."

But the detective did not smile back. "Do you know how old Slim says he is?" he asked.

"Over forty, I understand. But he doesn't look

it."

"Look it!" growled Larose. "He looks thirty-two or thirty-three to me, and Mrs. Salter instead of being

forty-six, as she says, is much nearer fifty-five."

"Well, it's a small matter," remarked the baronet, "and has no bearing on who killed Captain Dane"—he spoke haughtily—" and that is what you were sent down here to find out."

But Larose did not take up the challenge.

"Thank you," he said, "that's all I wanted to know." He looked the baronet straight in the face. "It is not necessary, of course, for me to remind you not to mention this conversation to anyone, least of all to Mrs. Salter or Slim."

"I would not hurt their feelings by mentioning it," sighed Sir James wearily. "I have too much regard for

them."

The detective passed out through the lounge hall and took his stand meditatively in the porch. It was now raining steadily, and save where the light shone through the windows of the Court, everything was in inky blackness. Suddenly he heard a light footfall behind him, and he was joined by Dr. Merryweather.

"Horrible night," remarked the doctor genially. "Want to go out, Mr. Larose, because if so I can lend

you a good mackintosh?"

Larose shook his head. "No, thank you," he replied. "I think I shall join the bridge people to-night."

A few minutes after midnight, when the chauffeur was about to get into bed, his wife suddenly gave a

startled little cry.

"Oh, George!" she exclaimed looking rather frightened. "I've just realized what's been worrying me all the evening. There was something strange about the cottage when I went there this afternoon, and it's only just come to me what it was. Someone had been smoking there just before I went in."

"Smoking?' What do you mean?" grunted her

husband.

"I smelt tobacco smoke strongly, and fresh tobacco smoke, too. I am sure of it now.'

Binks looked at her as if she had gone mad.

"Yes, someone had been smoking there," she went on excitedly, "and I distinctly remember now the strong whiff I got directly I opened the door. I was too nervous then to take it in.3

Binks's voice was hoarse and throaty. "And if I believed that," he growled, "I shouldn't get a wink of sleep all night. Only Slim and me, as you know, have

got keys and he's been in bed all day."

"But it's true," gasped the woman, "and I am sure of it. I had a presentiment then that I was being watched and that was why I hurried away. Perhaps there was someone in the kitchen watching me and if so-oh, George, he must have seen me pull out that shelf in the cupboard. I have an instinct now that someone was there."

Binks was a superstitious man, and he went white to the lips, but he was a man of action, too, and with one stretch of his arm he reached for his trousers and his

boots.

"Curse you," he swore, "why didn't you tell me this before? Now I'll have no peace until I've gone there myself and found out what a fool you are." He looked furiously at her. "And listen to that rain now, and I'll have to go the long way over the Downs too."
"Oh, George," wailed the woman again, "they

may have found out everything, and be waiting for some-

one to go there."

"Well, they'll get something if they are," retorted Binks savagely. "I'll take one of the dogs with me." And he proceeded to lace up his boots with feverish energy.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEATH OF THE ALSATIAN

HE night was pitch-black, a fierce squall had risen, and the rain was falling heavily as the chauffeur unlocked the gates and slipped like a shadow on to the high road. In one hand he was carrying a stout stick, and with the other he tugged at the big Alsatian, straining fiercely against the leash.

"Come back, you devil," he snarled, venting his rage upon the eager beast, "come back, will you." And he accompanied his words by vicious jerks at the animal's

collar.

Once out of the shelter of the walls, they met the full force of the driving rain, and so sharp was the discomfort that for some moments the chauffeur stood irresolute, and was almost upon the point of turning back.

But his doubts and anxiety were too strong to be put aside and so, with a muttered curse, he stepped forward

and thrust himself into the storm.

Keeping straight on, he would have had less than two miles to cover to reach the cottage, but, aware that of late police patrols had been seen upon that stretch of road at all hours of the night, he knew there was no help for it but to make a wide detour round and approach the cottage from over the Downs. Then he would pick up the road again about a quarter of a mile on the far side of his objective. So, directly he was clear of the Court grounds, he turned sharply up a narrow lane and soon, instead of the hard road, he had mud and sodden

turf beneath his feet. The dog had ceased to pull forward and, cowed by the lashing of the rain, was now hanging back and endeavouring to obtain as much shelter as possible from the chauffeur's body.

The way was nearly all uphill, and half an hour's progress brought them to the high ridge of a long and desolate stretch of down. Suddenly, then, the storm began to die away, the rain stopped and the sky in part

clearing, a ghostly moon shone through the mist.

The chauffeur paused to take his bearings and at once picked up the direction he would have to follow. Far away below lay the sleeping town of Eastbourne, and about a mile or so distant from where he stood, he could see the narrow road at the extreme end of which the two cottages were situated.

But between him and the road sloped a deep declivity in the Downs and he frowned uneasily when there came up to him from its depths the baa-ing of a sheep. The Alsatian heard it too, and in an instant he thrust his head forward, and his body stiffened in expectation.

The chauffeur sprang for his collar and gripping it in his powerful fist was ready to stifle any sound that the animal might attempt to make. He knew for what a long distance the bark of a dog would carry at night, and he was not certain as to how near any farm might lie.

With a curse, he lugged the dog forward by its collar, and began to climb diagonally down the slope. But his progress was slow, for the turf was slippery and the whole time the dog was struggling for its head.

They reached the bottom at last and then what the chauffeur had been fearing all along happened. He was pulled off his feet, the Alsatian's collar slipped out of his grip and, like a streak of lightning, the animal was among a mob of sheep, hemmed in by a low stone wall where they had been taking shelter from the rain.

The dog yelped excitedly and the sheep scattered in all directions, all save one and that unfortunate one in two seconds was gripped by the throat and pinned

bloodily to the ground.

The chauffeur was upon the dog before the sheep had ceased to struggle and, thrusting his stick fiercely inside the animal's collar, he twisted it violently until the choking beast was forced to let go his hold.

Then he pushed, and almost carried the big animal until they were a hundred yards and more away from

where the sheep had been seized.

"I'll kill you, you damned brute," he panted, "if you go again. I was a cursed fool to bring you with me, anyhow." And he wound the leash round his arm and gripped the dog by the collar again.

They came on to the road at last and the chauffeur, pausing for a few moments, strained his eyes in every direction to make certain that there was no one in sight.

But the road was quite empty and, apparently, he and the Alsatian were the only creatures awake in the sleeping

world.

Jerking the now shivering animal to its feet, he proceeded to make his way swiftly towards the cottage but, when almost there and topping a small rise in the road, he suddenly became aware of a horseman in front, coming in his direction.

In an instant he had sprung into a shallow ditch and, unmindful of the mud, was stretching himself flat down and pulling the Alsatian towards him. He pressed his

hands tightly over the big beast's ears.

The horseman came on leisurely, but when almost abreast of where the chauffeur lay, he reined in his mount sharply, and for a long minute sat in the attitude of a man who was listening. Then he turned his head slowly round in every direction.

The beats of the chauffeur's heart quickened for he

saw that the horseman was a policeman.

"He caught sight of me," he muttered, "and he's suspicious where I've gone"—he swore deeply—"and if this brute growls it'll be all up in a second."

There were moments then of intense drama upon that lonely road. The silent horseman, alert and vigilant, and the embodiment of the majesty of the law—and the

bloodied and muddied beasts lying huddled in the ditch, with the dog the far nobler beast of the two.

But the tension ended at last, and with a sharp clink of the bridle, the horseman shook up his mount and

passed up the road.

The chauffeur waited a good five minutes to make sure that the policeman was not remaining in the vicinity and then, cold and shivering, he crawled out of the ditch and at a quick run made for the cottage.

He paused for a moment at the garden gate, but there was nothing to arouse any suspicions and, lifting the latch very softly, with the Alsatian still held tightly in

the leash, he walked up the path.

He reached the door and was thrusting his hand in his pocket for the key, when suddenly the dog pricked

up his ears and emitted a low growl.

The chauffeur started, and for a moment stood hesitating, but then, apparently reassured by the darkness and the silence of the cottage, he kicked the animal in the ribs. "Shut up, you fool," he hissed savagely. "What's bitten you? There's nobody here."

But at the same time he was evidently in no mind to take risks for, having thrust the key in the lock and turned it, he let go the leash of the dog and kicking the door wide open, stepped back a couple of paces upon the

path.

The effect was as if a bomb had exploded.

The Alsatian with a loud yelp hurled himself into the darkness, a startled cry came from inside the cottage, a big electric torch was flashed and a burly figure jumped across the threshold and flung itself upon the chauffeur.

But Binks did not lose his head, and as calm and possessed as if nothing extraordinary were happening, he sent in a crashing blow upon his antagonist that brought the latter to the ground and then, without a second's hesitation, he turned and ran swiftly down the garden path and passed on to the road again.

A strange medley of sounds followed him, the snarling of the Alsatian, hoarse calls for help from someone inside

the cottage and then two pistol-shots, fired in quick succession.

"Noah's gone," he panted. "They've shot him, and

they were police right enough."

And then it came to him with a sickening feeling at his heart that undoubtedly the secret of the cottage had been found out, and he went cold in fear as he speculated what it would forebode for him. But instantly he comforted himself again with the thought that, after all, he could not have been recognized, and it was quite possible also that his wife had not been recognized either, the previous afternoon.

So, if he could only get back to the lodge unseen, he told himself, although it would soon be discovered that the Alsatian was one of the dogs belonging to the Court, yet still there would be nothing to prove that he

had been the man with it that night.

He ran swiftly down the road, determining that before he came to any other dwelling-places he would turn off across the fields and make his way back over the Downs in the same manner as he had come.

And then he heard a sound behind him that, panting as he was, made his blood run cold—the thud of the hoofs of a galloping horse.

"The mounted policeman!" he gasped. "He heard

those shots. I had forgotten him.'

He flashed a quick glance over his shoulder, hoping against hope that the rider had not seen him, but he realized upon the instant that there could be no mistake about that. The policeman was not two hundred yards behind, he was riding in the centre of the road and, bending forward, was urging on his mount to its utmost speed.

Binks's thoughts coursed like lightning through him, and the possibility of the one chance of escape avalanched

itself into his mind.

Upon one side of the road was a wall of loose stones, and a furlong or so on the other side of it was a small plantation of trees set like an oasis in a big open field,

and if he could only gain the shelter there he was sure the horseman could not follow him. The plantation was certainly not a big one, but one single man could not watch all round it at the same time and there would be some chance, surely, of his being able to slip away unseen. The rain was not all over, the stars were already obscured again up over the Downs and the friendly darkness might descend again any minute.

He sprang to the wall and scrambled over it and, running at his utmost speed had almost reached the plantation when he heard an encouraging shout from the direction of the road behind and he turned, just in time to see the policeman's horse clearing a five-barred

gate that opened into the field.

The policeman, evidently then realizing that he was much too late to ride down his quarry in the open, shouted to him to stop and accompanied his admonition by three pistol-shots, but Binks had not been through the war for nothing and he sneered scornfully at the idea of being hit with a pistol at over one hundred yards and, slackening his pace, even, was deep among the trees before his pursuer had reached the edge of the plantation.

"Now," he panted hopefully, "I'll wait till the moon

goes in again and get away somehow."

But if Binks had scored all the tricks so far, his opponent was evidently no fool, for, not content with blowing a whistle in a loud and sustained blast, he proceeded to ride rapidly round and round the plantation, keeping, however, well away from it and describing a wide circle each time. By these means he was effectually preventing the fugitive from bolting out unnoticed, for never, at any time, could the latter have got far enough away to prevent himself being seen and run down:

A couple of minutes later, Binks, to his consternation saw a light being flashed from the direction of the cottage, followed by the hail of voices, and the appearance of two

shadowy figures out of the mist.

"We've got him," shouted the mounted policeman. "He's in there. Any of you hurt?" he added.

"Not much," came back the answering shout. got a crack over the eye and Brown was bitten on the arm."

"Has he got a gun?" asked the policeman.
"Don't know," was the reply. "It was mine you heard. I was shooting the dog he'd brought with him."

"Who is he?" asked the policeman.

"Don't know," was again the reply, "but he's wanted

and he knows it right enough."

"Then close in," shouted the policeman, "and flash your torch among the trees. "We'll soon get him out."
"But electric torches don't last for ever," sneered the

chauffeur to himself, "and there are three hours to go yet before there'll be a glimmer of light." He looked up at the sky. "And it's any odds on there being rain, long before that." He gritted his teeth savagely together. "I can account for all these gents, if I'm lucky enough to get them, one by one."

But the chauffeur's good fortune had evidently come to an end, for new actors were now appearing upon the

scene.

More voices were heard in the distance, a lantern was seen to be swinging as if it were being carried in someone's hand and two big sheep-dogs came up barking, in advance.

"Look out," shouted the mounted policeman. "He

may try and bolt now for it's his last chance."

The chauffeur cursed deeply and big beads of sweat came out upon his forehead. He was cornered and he

knew it. The dogs would locate him at once.

But he was game to the last and darting from his cover, he made like an arrow for the stone wall, banking upon the one chance in a million that he would reach it before the mounted policeman had seen him and could follow on his horse.

But the millionth chance failed him, and before he had gone fifty yards, the horseman was upon him. He was jerked off his feet and then thrown violently backwards and finally pinioned against the ground.

"I might have guessed it," said Detective Naylor grimly, flashing a torch on his face. "George Binks, the chauffeur from the Court." He snapped on the handcuffs. "Thank you, my friend, for that black eye. You've spoilt my beauty for a week."
"What's he done?" asked one of the two men who

had come up with the lantern.

"Lots of things," replied Naylor evasively, "and for one, his dog's been among your sheep. It was bloodied up to the shoulders before I shot it a few minutes ago."

In the meanwhile the chauffeur's wife had been spending a very anxious time and she continued to spend it long after her soaking and bedraggled husband had been conveyed to the police station and lodged in the cells.

She had switched off the light directly he had gone and tried her hardest to get to sleep, but, do all she might, she had not been able to prevent the torment of her thoughts, and hour after hour went by before at last exhausted nature had its way and she had dropped off into a heavy slumber.

It was nearly half-past six when she awoke and then she sat up with a start. Her husband's place by her side was cold and vacant and she trembled like a leaf when she started to wonder what had become of him. The terrors of the night returned to her and she was sure now that he had been arrested by the police.

She dressed hurriedly and hearing a whimpering outside the front door, opened it to find Esau, the Alsatian, waiting on the step, and she remembered then that her husband had said he was going to take one of the dogs with him, and her fears increased tenfold.

The dog seemed dejected and to have a mournful look in his eyes, and when she put down a saucer of milk

he refused it and turned away.

She led him round to the back and shut him up in the kennels, then, after having first unlocked the gates with a duplicate key that was always kept hanging over the mantelshelf, she composed her face to a calm expression and walked over to the Court to interview Mrs. Salter.

She caught the housekeeper alone in the kitchen and in a few words told her quickly what had happened. Mrs. Salter's face blanched as she listened, but she be-

trayed no weakness in dealing with the situation.

"We don't know what has happened yet," she said sharply, "and that anyone was in hiding there may be all imagination on your part. If there were police in there when you went, of course, they'd have stopped you and asked you questions. Anyhow I don't see how they could have been watching you, without you seeing them." She tossed her head disdainfully. "I believe you sent George on a fool's errand last night."

"But he left just after midnight," protested Mrs. Binks tearfully, "and he should have been back in an

hour."

"Not in that storm," said Mrs. Salter, "and you may depend upon it, he went the long way over the Downs. Then when he got there, he may have waited for the rain to stop, and perhaps gone to sleep." She sneered. "You know what George is and he may have slept all night and now—he's afraid to come out until it's night again."

"But what am I to do?" wailed Mrs. Binks. "What

am I to say?"

"Nothing," was the stern reply, "except, say that George is ill and can't get up to-day. I'll take up a message at once to the master, that he's got the 'flu.

Don't say a word to anyone about the dog."

In some way comforted by the confident assurance of the elder woman, Mrs. Binks returned to the lodge, but she would not have felt so easy in her mind if she had been present in the butler's room a few moments afterwards.

It was now Mrs. Salter who was the terrified one and

Slim who was stolidly incredulous.

"George has got drunk," he said contemptuously, "and he's now sleeping it off. He's sure to have taken one nip of whisky after that walk through the rain and, with no one there to prevent him, he probably took the lot. If he'd been caught by the police, they'd have been buzzing round here long before now, and you say that no one's even rung up that Larose."

"No," replied the woman, now comforted in her turn, "the phone's not gone all night. My room door's never been shut and I should have heard if it had. I

left it open in case you called."

"Well, don't worry any more about it," growled Slim. He thought for a moment. "Still, I'll make out I'm much worse than I am, so that no one will come bothering me and I'll stay here in bed. Say I've been sick all night. Yes, and get that bottle of eye-drops that I had last month when my eyes were being tested. I'll put some in one eye and make that pupil look big. I read in a paper the other day that after an injury to the head, when one pupil is bigger than the other, it's the sign of a broken skull. Then, fetch Merryweather to me in half an hour."

"Well, at any rate," said the housekeeper doubtfully, if George hasn't come back by lunch-time, I'll walk up and see Mrs. Provost with some excuse and find out if

there's any news from her."

"All right," replied Slim grumpily, "but it'll be a journey for nothing, I tell you. Now you go and fetch those drops and I'll be ready for anyone who comes then."

So, during breakfast it was announced to everyone generally that the chauffeur, too, was now down with influenza and that Slim had taken a bad turn and was not so well.

Just after nine Larose was summoned to the phone and

the inspector spoke.

"I didn't ring before," he rattled off, "because I didn't want to scare anyone up there by showing urgency." His voice quivered in excitement. "We've got Binks here in the cells. He was taken after visiting the cottage about one a.m. He had got one of the Alsatians with him and it was shot. He refuses to say anything."

Larose whistled. "And it has been given out here

by his wife," he chuckled, "that he is in bed with 'flu. Slim's in bed, too, and looking very crook. I've just

seen him and he's been vomiting all night."

"Well, Slim can't do a bolt now," went on the inspector, "for I've had the Court picketed since long before dawn, with orders to stop him instantly if he comes out. But you come down at once, will you, and we'll decide what we are going to do?"

"All right," replied Larose, "but I won't unduly hurry, for nobody up here can be aware of what's really happened to Binks, and I don't know how many are

watching everything I do."

Half an hour later the inspector was narrating to a very mystified Larose all that had taken place during the

"And he won't say a word as to why he went up there," concluded the inspector, "except that he just smiles and says he was taking a walk. He declares we have nothing

"Bluff!" scoffed Larose. "But have him in here and we'll make him talk. We'll frighten him through

his wife." So the chauffeur was brought in, and stood a bedraggled and muddied figure with a sturdy policeman on either side. He exhibited no signs of fear, however; on the contrary, he looked rather amused.

"But I don't think they need wait," said Larose, dicating the policemen. "Give Mr. Binks a chair, indicating the policemen.

and then you can leave us."

Binks sat down in a careless, off-hand manner and no one spoke until the constables left the room. Then Larose said quite pleasantly: "It's all up, George, and you'd better make a clean breast of it. It'll save us a little trouble and it'll make things a lot easier for you."

"What's up?" asked Binks brusquely, blinking his

little eyes.

"You are, my son," replied the detective. "You're up, high and dry like a fish jerked up to the bank." He nodded his head. "You'll get five years, George-or

perhaps seven for those burglaries, and if you were mixed up in that murder you'll get ten or twenty or you'll swing for it if it were you who struck the actual blow."

The chauffeur's face paled, but he showed a bold front. "I'd never heard anything about the murder, as I've told you," he said, "until I heard it from the police." He glared at the detective. "You've got nothing against

me, and I demand to see a lawyer at once."

"Nothing against you!" exclaimed Larose sarcastically. "Or nothing against your wife, either, I suppose?" His voice was almost savage in its sternness. "What about that sable choker she was seen to hide yesterday in the hole between the cupboard—the sable that was stolen from Admiral Bain?" He turned casually to the inspector. "By the by, have you made the arrest yet of Susan Binks?"

The chauffeur's face lost all its strength and his big

body shook.

"She had nothing to do with it," he exclaimed chokingly. "She didn't know where it came from when I gave it her." He rose from his chair, and advanced menacingly towards the detective. "Don't you dare lay a finger upon her."

But Larose was quite calm and he waved the chauffeur

back.

"Sit down, George," he said irritably, "and don't be a darned fool. We don't want to drag in your missus and probably we shan't do so, for of course, she was acting under your orders, but how we deal with her depends altogether upon how you deal with us. We want a clean up of everything." He shook his finger warningly at the chauffeur. "We know you and Slim were mixed up in those burglaries; we know Mrs. Salter owns those cottages; and we have opened the hiding-place in the cupboard and found the sable, the picture, and the candlesticks." His voice was very low and solemn. "But we want more than that—we want the killer of Captain Dane."

"I don't know anything about that, I tell you," scowled the chauffeur. His face broke into a sheepish grin, and then suddenly he drew himself up erect and proudly. "But all those jobs were ours—Slim's and mine—and I suppose now there's no help but to own up. We cracked Captain Harding's, the Honourable Poole's, old Mrs. Hardwick's, Lord Temple's, Admiral Bain's, and all the rest. The whole damned lot were ours and " -he looked mockingly at the inspector-"all done under your very nose." He rubbed his hands together. "No fuss, no bother, and every job as clean and neat as you could wish." His face darkened and he shook his head emphatically. "But that murder—it had nothing to do with me and it came as a thundering shock."

"But Slim," suggested the inspector sternly; "was it his work then?"

"You ask him," retoted Binks instantly. His voice took on a sneering tone. "Ask Mr. Ernest—Edward— Slim." He turned to Larose and spoke very quickly. "Look you here, Mr. Larose. You said there was a quarrel that morning between me and Slim and so there was. I accused him of killing the captain and taking those notes, and he swore at me more than I've ever been sworn at before in all my life. He denied it and was furious with rage. He said it would bring all the 'tecs in the kingdom down upon us and there'd be the very devil to pay "-Binks spat on his hands-"and so there is."

"And did you believe Slim?" asked the inspector

sharply.

The chauffeur hesitated a long time. "I dunno," he said very slowly, "for Ernest-Edward-Slim, Esquire, is a deep 'un and a very clever man."

"And if he killed the captain and took those notes," went on the inspector, "where would he have been

likely to have hidden them, do you think?"

It was evident that Binks, in spite of their association in crime together, had no great liking for the butler at the Court, for now he seemed quite willing to express his

opinions.

"He was always at that cottage on his off days," he replied meditatively, "and he made that cupboard himself. You couldn't find a better carpenter, and I wouldn't put it past him that there are not other secrets there. I never quite trusted him and I don't think he was ever fair in dividing up what we got."

"But he's never left the Court since the murder was discovered," frowned the inspector. "He could have

had no opportunity of hiding the notes there."

Binks laughed. "Oh, you don't know Slim. He's a live wire, he is, and if he killed that captain, it would be just like him to buck straight off at once to the cottage and then come back and go to bed as if nothing had happened." He shook his head. "He's been in the hanky-panky business long before he met me and he's very thorough."

"And what will your wife be thinking has become of you," asked the inspector, "now you've not gone back

home?"

Binks grinned. "On the booze," he replied. "I've

been on it before."

"And it was you who hit Slim the other night," smiled Larose, "thinking, of course, you were hitting me."

Binks nodded. "I didn't know what you were up to, but Slim had said you would probably be prowling about at night and I was on the look-out for you. I thought perhaps that you'd be coming to listen round our window."

"Well," said Larose sharply, and the smile died from his face, "what's on now between Slim and Dr. Merry-

weather?"

The chauffeur looked astounded. "Nothing that I know of," he replied. "Slim's never mentioned him to me."

"But the doctor's got some game on," said Larose.

"What's he been doing in the garage?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Binks. "And you asked me that before." He nodded his head. "He was doing something he didn't want me to see, for I remember after you had spoken to me that whenever I had come near him he had moved away. He was filing something, but what it was didn't interest me at the time."

"And that's all you can tell us then?" asked the

inspector after a long pause.

"And isn't it quite enough," growled the chauffeur, "when it means a long stretch for me?" His face took on an anxious look. "But what about my wife now?"

"We shan't hurt her," said Larose kindly, "but I'm sorry for you, George, you've been a fool." He looked intently at him. "Now, one question more. Who do the maids up at the Court think killed Captain Dane?"

"Rainey, the actor chap," replied the chauffeur instantly, "because the captain was after his girl"—he smiled knowingly-" and it was all bunkum that everybody drank to the captain's health that night. Mabel told me half of the men never touched the wine in their glasses when they stood up. They were just being polite to the master, that was all. Mabel says they most of them hated the captain." A sudden gleam came into Binks's eyes. "Me, I've often wondered if Mr. Rainey killed him and then Slim came in and got the cash." He nodded his head solemnly. "Slim always knew everything that was going on up at the house, especially among any visitors. It was part of his method and he got a lot of valuable oil that way." He grinned. "We'd have been after the Culloden jewels, when they'd gone back to Scotland, if we could only both have got a holiday at the same time."

The chauffeur was led away presently and then a long consultation took place between Larose and the inspector; the latter was strong for arresting Slim at once, but

the detective was dead against it.

"We are as far off as ever from getting the killer of Captain Dane," he insisted, "and this is the last day before they all go away. No harm can be done by waiting until to-morrow, for there is still a chance that I may yet pick up the vital clue."

"But you'll have that chance just the same," argued

the inspector, "if we do arrest Slim."

"No," replied Larose emphatically, "I shall not. The arrest of Slim for those burglaries will be an eye-opener for the man who killed Dane and will warn him that we are not the impotent bunglers he now thinks we are." He emphasized the point with upraised hand. "At the present moment, they all believe we have found out nothing, and any untimely disclosure to the contrary will put the guilty party more than ever on his guard."

will put the guilty party more than ever on his guard."
"Well, I repeat," said the inspector firmly, "that
I think Slim did it and I should be wanting in my duty if
I didn't take him when I've got him under my hand."

"But if Slim did it," asked Larose sharply, "what do those actions of Dr. Merryweather mean? What was he trying to get in the billiard-room for? What was his object in making that key?" He thumped his fist upon the desk. "I tell you, sir, Merryweather wanted something from the billiard-room and wanted it badly too, and I—like a fool—let him get it." He sighed heavily. "I don't know what he wanted and what he took. I went over the billiard-room most minutely that night and I went over it again most minutely yesterday evening, and I could find no difference anywhere, nothing taken, nothing moved, and yet—I am sure that the doctor has been up to some tricks there."

"It's strange, certainly," commented the inspector slowly, "and I suppose there must be something to

explain."

"And his whole manner towards me has altered, too," went on Larose, "and from being reserved and not taking any notice of me, he is now most affable and friendly on the surface and yet—when he thinks I am not looking, he watches me and regards me most hostilely. I have caught him at it twice and Naughton Jones, too, noticed it particularly and warned me to be on my guard."

"Well, what's in your mind, Mr. Larose?" asked the

inspector. "What do you want to do?"

"Wait until the actual moment when he is about to leave the Court," replied Larose impressively, " and then force him to show his hand. Compel him to submit to a search and then we'll see what he is taking away."

A long silence followed, and then the inspector leant

back in his chair.

"All right," he said, "we won't argue any more. It shall be as you wish "—he smiled pleasantly—" you,

Gilbert Larose, the man who never fails."

Larose made a wry face. "Well, what about this idea of Binks's," he said, turning the conversation quickly, "that one of the house-party killed the captain and then that Slim hopped in and got the notes?" He shook his head. "It doesn't seem feasible to me but, still "-he hesitated—" of all of the men up there, Slim is undoubtedly the only one who would seize the opportunity of benefiting in a pecuniary way by the murder. He would be like the jackal coming upon the scene after the lion had made the kill."

"We'll go off to the cottage," said the inspector instantly, "you and I, and we'll search every cranny for that two thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds in banknotes. They'd make quite a small packet and might have

been stuffed anywhere."

Very doubtful as to any good accruing from it, Larose nevertheless expressed himself as being quite agreeable and so five minutes later they set off for Windmill Road in the police car. They abandoned the car in a quiet lane about a quarter of a mile from the cottage and proceeding for the rest of the journey on foot, made their way, as the detective had done the previous day, through the wood at the back.

Upon making themselves known, the door was at

once opened by one of the detectives inside.

"Anything happened?" asked the inspector.

"No, nothing," the detective replied, "except that a man on a bicycle has passed up and down the road a few

minutes ago and both times he stared hard as he went by the gate. I happened to be looking round the blind." What sort of a man was he?" asked the inspector.

"A working man, middle-aged and he'd got a bandage

upon one of his hands."

"Oh!" ejaculated Larose sharply. "A bandage upon one of his hands, had he?" He looked as if he were not too pleased. "How long ago did you say?"

"Between five and ten minutes," was the reply,

" certainly not more."

"Well, you stay by the window," went on Larose, "and if he comes by whilst we are here, let me know instantly."

"But do you attach any importance to it?" whispered the inspector anxiously. "Do you think we are being

watched?"

"Hardly," replied Larose, "but still it's a coincidence, and with things as they are it would be unwise to neglect anything, however small." He nodded his head significantly. "Just after we had left here yesterday afternoon we passed a man on a bicycle and I remember he had a bandaged hand."

"Oh!" exclaimed the inspector as if greatly relieved, "that's all, is it? Well, probably the man lives in this neighbourhood and was just passing in the ordinary way." He looked round the room. "But now for those banknotes and we'll see if we can't find them."

And then commenced a most intense search in the cottage not so much a search for an elaborate hidingplace cunningly contrived under the flooring or behind the walls, but rather a search for some place, in no way out of the ordinary but where a small packet like a bundle of notes could have been tucked hurriedly away.

Every inch of the four rooms was gone over and those of the small outhouses as well. The bricks in the fireplaces were shaken to see if any were loose, the chimneys were groped round as high as a man could reach his arm and each log in the wood-shed, even, was submitted to a

separate inspection.

But no sign of the notes was to be found anywhere and, well in the afternoon, the disgusted inspector proceeded

to rinse his hands under the kitchen tap.

"It's no good and we may as well go," he said to Larose. "Either they are not here, or the man has been too clever for us." He nodded to the two detectives. "You continue to carry on until you hear from me tomorrow." And accompanied by the Australian he went out by the front garden gate.

They turned into the road just one minute after the front door of the other cottage had been opened, in response to Mrs. Salter's tapping, by a man with a

bandage upon his hand.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CRAFT OF SLIM

AROSE was more uneasy about the coincidence of the reappearance and inquisitiveness of the man with the bandaged hand than he would have

liked the inspector to surmise.

He was always suspicious about coincidences and was always inclined to believe rather than otherwise, that they had their significances, and the fact, therefore, that the man had stared at the cottage, each time as he passed, he, Larose, was afraid meant something. If the man lived in the neighbourhood, as he probably did, and the cottages therefore were a familiar object to him, why as he rode by should he have taken any particular notice of them at all?

Yes, Larose was decidedly uneasy about the matter and so when he had parted with the inspector and finally arrived back at the Court, he paid a visit at once to the butler's room, and was not a little relieved to find him

still in bed.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, laying his fingers lightly upon the butler's pulse.

Slim narrowed his eyes and gave him an intense,

curious look.

"Giddy," he replied weakly, "and if I move my head

the room goes round."

"Well, it was a nasty crack," said Larose, "and you are bound to take a little time to get over it." He nodded his head and smiled. "You must have fallen heavily to have got a knock like that."

But Slim did not accept the challenge and, making no reply, closed his eyes wearily, as if conversation were

painful to him.

Satisfied now that the butler was in no condition to leave his bed, Larose went downstairs again and, passing through the lounge hall where tea was being served, made his way unobtrusively into the billiard-room.

It was unoccupied as he had expected and, approaching the cluster of knives that had been so much in his mind during the past two days, he made a rapid inspection of

them again.

"No, they've not been touched," he whispered.

"The blacklead is still upon that one and it would be a most damning piece of evidence if I could only find who had wielded the poker that put it there."

He sat down upon one of the settees and, lighting a

cigarette, his eyes roved meditatively round the room. "And that night," he went on, "if I had only known it, I had the key to everything in my hands. I am sure of it." He smiled sadly. "I was never nearer then than being the man who never failed and, as they say of me, I almost saw the very shadow of the killer upon the wall. I had never done finer work too, for out of almost nothing I had reconstructed the whole crime, and, was upon the very point of success, when "-his voice trailed away-"I lost touch somehow, my vision failed me, and I have been blind ever since."

He shook his head frowningly. "But the man who killed the captain has had his bad moments for he knows I have been hovering over him, as perhaps he has all the time, been hovering over me. I am sure——" He heard a soft footfall behind him and turning sharply, saw Dr.

Merryweather entering the room.

"I don't seem to have had a chance of speaking to you," said the doctor smilingly, seating himself down next to the detective, "since the great Naughton Jones left last night, and I've wanted to ask you a lot about him . He interested me very much, and struck me as being a very remarkable man."

"He is," replied Larose, hiding under a wooden expression his startled feelings at this sudden appearance of the very man who was then uppermost in his thoughts.

"And a great judge of character, I should say," went on the doctor, "for, with all his light and frivolous talk, he was, I could see, taking us all in all the time, and nothing was escaping him."

"Very little would," replied Larose curtly. He turned the conversation. "And what do you think of Slim? He doesn't seem as bright to me as he should be and yet he ought to have been fairly all right again by now."

The doctor was the professional man at once. "His general condition is not bad," he answered quickly, "but there is one rather disquieting symptom and I thought it wise for Sir James to call in his own medical man. Dr. Travers came up this morning."

"Oh, another doctor saw him," exclaimed Larose at

once. "Well, what's the disquieting symptom?"

"One of his pupils is slightly larger than the other," replied the doctor, "and that is generally indicative of some compression of the bone. At any rate it needs watching."

"He won't be able to get up then for a day or two,"

said the detective.

"Certainly not," replied Dr. Merryweather, "and he must be kept perfectly quiet." His face broke into a smile again. "But that Mr. Naughton Jones," he asked, "did he"—he hesitated—"now, did he assist you in any material way in your investigations?"

"He suggested several things for me to think over,"

replied Larose sharply.

The doctor was all interest. "And I suppose you had a regular consultation together," he went on with great animation. "You put down all your cards and he suggested which one you should play."

"The cards are not all dealt, Dr. Merryweather," said Larose sternly. "The pack is by no means exhausted

yet."

Dr. Merryweather sighed. "You are so mysterious,

Mr. Larose," he said, blinking his eyes, "and I am given to understand, so dramatic, too." He spoke most confidingly. "Now I should not be at all surprised if you had not already made up your mind and were intending to wait until the last moment and then arrest one of us just as we are all upon the point of going away." A sarcastic note crept into his voice. "A master-stroke before all the world to justify the description that has been given you, as the man who never failed."

"I shall do my duty, at any rate," said Larose coldly.

"That is what I am paid for."

"Ah, duty, duty!" exclaimed the doctor thoughtfully. He sighed. "Yes, of course, one should always do one's duty, however dreadful it may be." A short silence followed and then he went on hesitatingly: "And do you never-never temper justice with mercy, Mr. Larose? Never feel sorry for the poor wretch whom you are handing over to the gallows? You have no remorse at all?"

The detective regarded him with a puzzled frown. He could not understand why these questions were being put and yet he knew there must be some good reason for them. They were asked casually enough, it was true, but that some deeper motive underlay them he was

sure.

"I have the policeman mind," he replied stiffly, " and

I have only remorse when I fail."

"Just so, just so," exclaimed the doctor and he was all smiles again, "and I have no doubt I should feel the same if I were you. Business before sentiment every time." He rose suddenly to his feet and waved his arm round the walls. "No sentiment about any of these things anyhow. Look at all these spears and knives. Their mission is to cut and kill and they're all for the shedding of blood and the violent death."

He jumped up upon one of the settees and ran his fingers along a big spear. "Just see this one," he went on, proceeding quickly to untwist the wire that held it to its frame, "a most bloodthirsty weapon, used by the

tiger slayers of Malay. Seven feet long if it's an inch and you might think it was clumsy but it is beautifully balanced and quite a work of art. I'll bring it down and you can handle it."

But there was some difficulty in untwisting the wire and before he had time to loosen it all, loud voices were heard in the passage and Gentry Wardle and Clark

Rainey walked into the room.

"Hullo!" called out Gentry Wardle as if very surprised, "but what are you up to, Sam? Going to stick our one and only Larose, are you? I am astonished

The doctor's voice was perhaps just a little bit unsteady from his exertions. "No-o," he replied smilingly, "I was only just going to show him how beautifully balanced it is. I believe it's accounted for many a big tiger."

"Put it back, man, put it back," exclaimed Gentry Wardle sharply as he came nearer and perceived which particular spear the doctor was handling. "Jim would go cold if he caught you monkeying with that." He turned to the detective. "There's romance about that spear, Mr. Larose, for it saved Sir James's life once. A tiger was just upon him when a native got the brute with it through the heart." He took down a cue from the wall. "And now that I've saved you from the murderous doctor I'll play you a hundred up."
But Larose declined with a smile that was, however,

a very forced one. In spite of all his self-control, he was trembling and his knees were shaking together, for it had just come to him that he had been in great danger. Dr. Merryweather was breathing hard and his forehead was

all picked out in glistening beads of sweat.

About five o'clock Mrs. Salter returned to the Court and a few minutes later, glided furtively into the butler's room.

She had appeared the usual staid and unruffled housekeeper of Southdown Court when one of the maids had passed her in the passage, but the instant she was in Slim's room and the door pushed to, the mask dropped from her face and she looked terrified.

"It's all been found out, Will," she gasped hoarsely. "Tom Provost saw two men coming out of the cottage yesterday afternoon, and they were carrying a parcel and last night, in the middle of the night, there was a fight and several shots were fired." She almost broke down. "George is either killed or in prison."

The butler was as if stunned by the news; his mouth gaped, his eyes seemed starting from his head and his face

went ashen grey.

"Who told you?" he whispered with dry lips.
"Are you sure it's true?"

And then brokenly, and speaking at times as if she were

on the verge of collapse, Mrs. Salter told her story.

It appeared that Tom Provost had been on duty the previous afternoon and had cut his hand and having been attended to by the railway first aid had been sent home early. Just before he reached home and before passing the other cottage, he had noticed two men come out from the garden there, and one of them was carrying a flat parcel. He had thought it funny and made quite sure that the cottage was going to be let. Then in the night, about one o'clock, Mrs. Provost had been awakened by dreadful noises from the direction of the untenanted cottage. A dog had yelped savagely, there had been loud shouts, a gun or something had been fired twice and then there had been the sounds of a galloping horse upon the road. Then more shooting, but in the distance this time. Three shots she had counted one after the other, and then everything had become silent again. She had tried to induce her husband to go and see what had happened, but he had declined to get out of bed and, being very hard of hearing, had insisted that it was all imagination on her part and that she had dreamed it all.

The butler listened in dead silence and asked only one

question when she had finished.

"Did Provost say what the men were like he saw in the afternoon?"

"One was medium sized, he said," replied Mrs. Salter, "and the other was big and tall and had a big moustache. He carried the parcel."

"Larose and Naylor," commented the butler. He turned with misty eyes to the woman. "It's all up, mother. I must cut and get into smoke while I can."

"Oh, I knew we should get caught one day," wailed the woman. "You ought never to have started on this, Will. You ought to have turned over a new leaf when you had the chance." She bit her lip. "But how could they have found out?"

But her son was not listening to her. His face had now lost it's look of fear and, instead, he was frowning

hard. His thoughts were evidently far away.

"Now, I wonder if they got George," he said after a few moments, and as if speaking to himself, " or whether he got away and is hiding and will come back to-night. They didn't get him at the cottage. That's a certainty, or there'd have been none of that firing later. Those three other shots probably mean he wasn't caught."

"But if they've caught him," cried Mrs. Salter, "he'll

tell everything about us."

The butler shook his head. "Not at first," he said. "George is as stubborn as a mule and a great liar." His face lost a little of its assurance. "They would only make him speak through his wife."

"But perhaps he's dead," said Mrs. Salter quickly.
"Perhaps they shot him and if so they can have nothing

against you." "Sue will tell everything," said the butler grimly, "directly she knows for certain that anything has happened to George." He shook his head. "I tell you it's no good, mother. It's all up. They'll find out you own the cottage, anyhow. The Provosts will identify me as having worked there and once the 'tecs start enquiring, they'd trace a hundred things to me."
He scowled. "That Larose would do it in twenty-four hours and I believe it's he who's done all this now." He dropped his voice to a whisper. "But you don't think

he suspects me yet. There's no one on guard on the

landing is there?"

"No," replied Mrs. Salter, looking terrified, "and everything has been just as ordinary all day. No one's been watching us."

"Then I'll get off to-night," said the butler quickly.

"How much money have you got handy?"

"About nine pounds," was the reply.

"That'll do and I'll get away in one of the cars although it'll be crook, driving with this doped eye." He issued his orders quickly and with no hesitation. "Now listen. You step round now to the garage and get a pair of wire-cutters. Notice too, which cars are nearest the doors; I want Sir James's or Wardle's. Then at exactly nine o'clock—it'll be dark by then, you'll go down to the telephone cabinet and cut the wires just under the box. Then, keep the maids talking in the kitchen and I'll get out through the library window. A quarter of an hour's start and I'll be all right. If I can get to Lewes before they put it on the air, they'll never catch me."

"But they'll stop every car, Will," argued the woman

"You'lltearfully.

"I shan't take the car into Lewes," he interrupted sharply. "I shall get rid of it in that unused quarry about a mile this side of the town. Then I shall take the train from Lewes to Brighton. There's one leaves there at a quarter to ten, and in Brighton I know where I can get hidden until everything's died down and I can go on to London."

"But I shall come with you," cried the woman. "I'm

not going to be separated from you any more."

"No," said the butler firmly, "no, mother, you're not

coming."

She clasped her hands together and spoke very rapidly. "But it means prison for me if I stay, Will, for as you've said, they'll find out at once that the cottage is mine and they'll be certain that I knew all that was going on. Then of course that Naughton Jones has told them that

he is sure we are relations and they'll go into that. They'll find out you're not Slim and I shall be prosecuted

for bringing you here. I am sure-"

"All right, mother," he said quickly, "you shall come with me. We won't run any risk and we'll get away before they can lay any charge." He spoke quite hopefully. "After all, they cannot have caught George and cannot even have recognized him or they'd have been round here questioning us long before now. That Larose came to see me not half an hour ago and he was just the same. Now you slip round to the garage and get those snippers, quick. No one will see you for it's started raining and they'll all be in the hall."

But one person at all events did see her and that person,

of all persons, happened to be Larose.

He had gone up to his bedroom because he wanted to be alone with his own thoughts. He wanted to put in their right perspective the events that had just happened in the billiard-room. He could not understand them at all.

First, Dr. Merryweather had almost been pleading with him to have mercy upon someone; then, he had said it was of course right to do one's duty, however dreadful—and finally he, Larose, was almost sure the doctor had been upon the point of making a murderous attack upon him with that spear.

Larose was standing meditating behind the curtain of the window, thinking of all these things, when suddenly he caught sight of a woman running across the yard below, with a shawl over her head to protect her from the drizzling rain, and the furtive way in which she ran interested him at once.

She was keeping very close to the side of the house as if to escape observation and several times she glanced at the windows of the opposite wing as if to see if anyone were observing her.

Larose wondered where she could be going when suddenly she turned off at right angles to the house and,

darting over to the garage, passed through the half-

opened doors.

She was not inside, however, for more than a minute and then she came running out again and accomplished her return journey in the same secretive fashion as before finally disappearing round the house in the direction of

the kitchen quarters.

"Ah!" ejaculated the detective. "Mrs. Salter, and she was doing something she didn't want anyone to see." He frowned thoughtfully. "And we may confidently presume she was doing it on Slim's behalf, therefore"—he nodded his head energetically—"I'll give that gentleman plenty of attention to-night."

So, about a quarter of an hour before dinner, the detective visited the butler again, taking with him as an

excuse, one of the evening papers.

As Larose turned the handle of the bedroom door, he thought he heard the springs of the bed creek but, entering the room, he saw that the butler was lying perfectly motionless and apparently dozing, and he had to approach right up to the bed before the man opened his eyes. Then the butler regarded the detective with a startled stare, and as if, for some moments, he could not take in who his visitor was.

"Well, and how are you to-night?" asked Larose feeling for the sick man's pulse as a matter of course.

The butler muttered something that sounded like: "Quite well, thank you, sir," and then closed his eyes

again.

Seeing that the man was either unable or unwilling to carry on any conversation, Larose moved away from the bedside and walked meditatively to the window. He was in two minds about the butler for either the latter was shamming or else he was in a really bad way. His pulse, the detective estimated, was now well over ninety as against about seventy when he had last taken it in the afternoon.

Three or four minutes went by with Larose wondering all the time as to whether or not Slim were watching him,

but he did not look round and he just stood as if he had nothing particular to do and were filling in his time by staring idly out of the window.

Then with a sigh that must have been perfectly audible to the invalid, he turned and walked back to the bed

again.

"Good night," he said gently and then perhaps just as a matter of form again, he felt under the bedclothes for the butler's wrist. But he held it only for just three or four seconds and then pulling up the coverlet, he turned and left the room.

"A drop from more than ninety to less than seventy-five in three or four minutes!" He whistled as he stood outside on the landing. "And that means that he's not dopey as he wants to make out, but is quite sensitive to emotional influences." He nodded his head. "Yes, when I came in, he was frightened for some reason, but then, thinking everything was all right, he calmed down at once." The detective screwed up his eyes into a frown. "Now, why was he frightened? What was he anticipating? I didn't frighten him when I went in a little over two hours ago for his pulse was quite steady then. Well, what has happened in the meanwhile to put his nerves on edge?"

But Larose could not answer his own question and, proceeding downstairs, he looked into the dining-room where Betty Yates was superintending the final arrangements of the table. He beckoned her to him.

"Any telephone messages come in for anyone this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes, several," replied the parlourmaid. "One for Miss Winchester about a dress—another, a trunk call, for Lady Drews asking her when she was coming back—another for Mr. Rainey, and I don't know what it was about—and a message from the fishmonger for Mrs. Salter."

"Oh!" exclaimed Larose eagerly, "and did you hear

anything she said on the phone.'

"She didn't go to the phone," replied the parlourmaid.

"She was out and I gave the message to her when she came in. It was only about the salmon for to-night."
"She was out, was she?" queried Larose frowning.

"What time did she go out and what time did she

return?"

"She went out soon after three, she got a lift in the van from Sendens that was delivering some linoleum here, and she came back, I think, some time just after five."

"And did she go up to Mr. Slim's room?" asked

Larose quickly.

"I expect so," replied the girl. "At any rate she

went upstairs at once."

"Thank you," said Larose, and turning into the corridor, he stood for some moments in deep thought.

"That's it," he murmured. "Mrs. Salter brought in some news that upset him." He shook his head in annoyance. "She ought never to have been allowed to go out, but still, short of actually arresting her and Slim, I don't see how it could have been prevented. Now what am I to do? I know I am running risks in continuing to let them alone and yet, if I spring the trap at once upon Slim, I shall be warning off anyone else who may be coming into it. I'm certain that Merryweather is very worried about something, and as he undoubtedly does not seem content to sit quietly under it, he may act foolishly any moment and then I'll find out what he's up to." He shook his head again. "But I'm certainly troubled about Slim, and I think I'll ring up that other doctor who saw him this morning."

He shut himself in the telephone cabinet and put a call through for Dr. Travers. Luckily the doctor was at

home and he came to the phone at once.

"I'm Larose, Gilbert Larose," began the detective, and he paused a moment to let the information sink in.

"Larose, Larose!" came back the quick response. "Sorry, but I've never heard of you. Oh, beg pardon! Yes, I remember—you're one of the actors now playing in the 'Touch and Go' company here. Well, what

can I do for you?"

Larose grinned to himself. "I'm in a slightly different company from that, Dr. Travers," he said. "In fact I'm attached to Scotland Yard. I'm speaking from Southdown Court, and I'm on a special mission here to investigate that murder of Captain Dane."

"Oh, I beg your pardon again," came from the

doctor. "Well, what do you want?"

"You visited the butler here this morning," said Larose, "and I shall be very much obliged if you will tell me exactly what his condition is."

"I wish I could," replied the doctor sharply. "He's got a head injury and I don't know how serious it is."

"Do you think that he's in a bad way?" asked Larose.

"I can't tell, although judging from the outward appearance of the wound I should have been of opinion that he wasn't much hurt."

"It's possible then he may be quite well again in a

day or two?"

The doctor spoke rather irritably. "You can never be certain of anything where there's been an injury to the head, and we shall have to await developments. I'm going to see him again to-morrow and then, perhaps, I may be able to give you a more definite opinion."

"But could he get out of bed now and walk?" asked

Larose.

"A very little way," was the reply, "and then he'd probably become giddy. He couldn't go far."
"Thank you," said Larose. "I'm much obliged to

you." And he hung up the receiver.

Somewhat easier in his mind, a few minutes later the detective sat down to dinner with the full intention of forgetting his worries and appreciating the good meal, but he very quickly realized there was going to be no enjoyment for him.

In spite of his generally optimistic nature, he felt most dispirited, for he could not put away from him the thought that he was now facing defeat. The sands of opportunity were indeed running out, and in a few hours the house-party would be dispersing and among them, free and untrammelled, would go the killer of Captain Dane.

And the galling part of it was that the guilty person was now certainly sitting at the table with him, and no

doubt gloating over him in his discomfiture.

Yes, among those smiling men and women was one whose hands were stained with blood, and one who, if justice had its course, would in a few short weeks be mounting the scaffold or, at best, be hearing the clang of the prison gates as they closed upon him for a long period of dark and despairing years.

He looked round upon them all and a dreadful doubt

at once assailed him.

He must be making a mistake. This was no atmosphere of crime. They were all ladies and gentlemen here.

Sir James Marley with his fine, clear-cut, aristocratic face; Gentry Wardle, proud and courtly, and with the stamp of culture and authority upon him; Clark Rainey, handsome and debonair, and with the frank and fearless eyes of a man who had nothing dishonourable to hide; Dr. Merryweather, so kind and gentle-looking, and apparently incapable of any action that was despicable or mean; the Honourable Donald Culloden, a gentleman whatever—but the detective pulled himself together, and thought of Slim.

Ah, but there was something tangible there! One person, at all events, of infinite craft and guile had been hiding under this roof and it was to his, Larose's, credit that he had unmasked him and brought him within the

meshes of the law.

And then the uneasy feeling about the butler came uppermost again into the detective's mind and all the suspicions of an hour ago began to worry him afresh.

What had Mrs. Salter been going to the garage for in such a furtive manner and why had Slim's pulse gone up and down at such a quickly changing rate?

It was a most unpleasant meal for Larose, and he was

very glad when it was over. He was the first to get up after the ladies, and then he immediately went quickly up to the butler's room.

The door was shut, and opening it softly he found the room in darkness. Evidently, he thought, Slim had

been settled for the night and was now asleep.

He pushed the door to gently, and then, striking a match, tiptoed softly up to the bed. He saw the outline of the butler's recumbent figure but his face was not visible for the bedclothes were tucked up high about his head.

The detective stood perfectly still and the match went out.

For five seconds, perhaps, there was silence and then Larose started as if he had been stung by a wasp.

He had been listening for the sound of breathing and

he had heard none.

His movements were then as swift as lightning. He thrust his arm down on to the bed and grabbed a bolster where the butler's body should have been. Then he thrust his hand right down under the bedclothes, and a split second later had struck another match and was making for the door.

He ran into his room and snatching up an electric torch raced down the stairs like an acrobat. Gaining the hall, however, he slowed down to a careless walk as long as he was in view of the company, then, turning into the passage that led to the billiard-room, he accelerated

to a quick run again.

The billiard-room was empty, and passing quickly through it without switching on the lights, he softly unlocked the outer door and in two seconds was standing in the grounds.

It was quite dark and crouching by the corner of the building, he strained his eyes in the direction of the

garage. He was panting from his exertions.

For the moment he was uncertain what to do. That Slim would endeavour to escape by car he was quite sure, but that the butler had already gone he was very doubtful. The bedclothes had been quite warm when he had thrust his hand down under them and that meant Slim could not have been out of them for many minutes.

He crept round on to the drive in front of the house

and then what he was half expecting happened.

He heard the sliding of the garage doors, the gentle purring of the engine as a car glided out and then car lights were switched on.

They picked him out instantly and in a flash his hand went back to his hip pocket. He would shoot at the

tyres as the car came within range.

Then suddenly something bewildering happened. He felt a burning stab in his chest, and he heard a sound as of the muffled cracking of a whip. Then all the strength seemed to go out of his legs and he tottered and sagged limply down, just where he had been standing.

The car gathered pace and approaching to where he had fallen, described a sharp curve to avoid him. Then it was accelerated quickly and disappeared up the drive.

And everything had happened so quickly. It was not three minutes since Larose had risen from the dinnertable and now he was lying in the middle of the drive, shot through the right lung.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OPIATE DREAM

AROSE never quite knew exactly what happened that night, in the few succeeding minutes that followed upon his being shot down in the drive of Southdown Court.

He never lost consciousness, and he was not in great pain, but he felt terribly weak and for the time being could not think coherently. He was like a man recover-

ing from an anæsthetic.

Then gradually his mind cleared and vexation, rather than anxiety for himself, became his uppermost thought. He was down and out just at the supreme moment when he should have been most active and he would blame himself for ever for the carelessness that had caused him to be out-manœuvred as he had been.

Then he began to cough and when he put his hand up to his mouth, he knew, if indeed he had had any doubt

before, the nature of the wound he had received.

"Well, I'm not dead, at all events"—he smiled weakly -" and I don't appear to be bleeding much, so now for getting on to the inspector and stopping that car?"

He rose ever so gently to his feet and then, keeping his hands pressed tightly against his chest, step by step, picked his way very slowly round to the front door.

But the exertion was too much for him and again everything became hazy so that, later, it was with difficulty that he could piece together even a few of the

things that happened.

He remembered staggering into the hall and sinking down into a chair and then hearing startled voices and

seeing all round him white and frightened faces.

Then many people bent over him and their looks were full of pity and compassion. "A bullet wound, right through him," Dr. Merryweather gasped. "Poor fellow, poor fellow!" And he handled him with the tenderness of a lover.

Then Colonel Mead exclaimed boisterously: "Never mind, sir, never mind. I've seen thousands shot like

you and they've nearly all got well."

Lady Marley came and knelt beside him and wiped his mouth with her handkerchief when he coughed. And the handkerchief smelt of some dainty scent, and his blood smeared her white fingers but she didn't seem to mind. Her face was the colour of marble and her eyes were dilated with horror, but her hand was cold and steady and she stroked his forehead and told him he would be well again very soon.

And then suddenly his mind cleared and he was conscious of everything and, in a flash, he was the master-

ful Larose again.

He was handicapped by the blood that made him cough repeatedly and he had to give his orders in jerks, but he gave them sharply and as if it were his right, as representing the majesty of the law, to be obeyed.

"Slim shot me," he gasped. "He's escaped—in one of the cars. He's wanted—ring up the inspector—tell him about me—that I'm out of it. Find out—which car Slim took—so that they'll broadcast it—don't let

Mrs. Salter leave the Court-she's wanted too."

Sir James Marley himself ran instantly to the telephone to return, however, very soon with the information, that he imparted only to Gentry Wardle and Clark Rainey, that it was dead, the wires having been cut away. "Quick, off to the police station, Wardle," he whis-

"Quick, off to the police station, Wardle," he whispered sharply, "and you, Rainey, go for Dr. Travers at once. As quick as you can, for I don't like the look of this poor fellow." A catch came into his voice. "There's

a curse on this house of mine."

In the meantime, under the direction of Dr. Merryweather, the detective was carried upstairs and, propped up with pillows, he reclined, a ghastly figure, upon the bed.

"I'm no surgeon," explained the doctor to Sir James, "and as he is in no immediate danger, I'll leave him as

he is until Travers comes."

But it was not Dr. Travers who arrived first. It was the surgeon attached to the Eastbourne police and he strode into the room accompanied by Lady Marley. He was quick in his examination and sharp of speech.

"Not a very bad wound, Mr. Larose," he remarked cheerfully, "and you're not going to die. You're lucky. It's gone right through you and it's high up. It's missed the big arteries and it doesn't appear to have touched any bones."

"How-long-shall-I-be-laid up?" asked Larose

weakly. "Can't say," was the reply. "Six weeks to two months. All of that and the main treatment will be absolute rest. The less you move about the quicker you'll get well." He turned to the door. "Cough as gently as you can. I'll be back in a few minutes." He beckoned Lady Marley outside where they found Sir James waiting for them.

The police surgeon hesitated and frowned.

"I really ought to take him to hospital," he said slowly, "but considering the nature of his wound, his condition couldn't be better and I'm chary of bringing on greater hæmorrhage."

"Then let him remain here," exclaimed Sir James quickly. "He shall have the best of everything, and except for ourselves, the Court will be empty after to-

morrow."

"Oh, yes, do leave him here," supplemented Lady Marley plaintively. "We can't do too much for him seeing he was shot by one of our servants."

"But you understand what it means?" asked the police-surgeon sharply. "The best room you have turned into a ward; two nurses here; no noises; the house like a grave and all that."

"We shan't mind anything," replied Sir James instantly. "The whole house is at your disposal."

"Good!" exclaimed the police-surgeon. "Then that's settled. I'm going to give him some morphia now, and then I'll pick out a room. It'll be septic trouble we'll have most to fear, and I shall want everything stripped; curtains, carpets, furniture, everything. I'll show you what you must do and then I'll go and get the nurses and be back in about an hour."

There was the sound of voices in the hall below and Inspector Roberts came running up, three stairs at a

time.

"Is he dead?" he panted.

"No," replied the surgeon with a grim smile, "and not likely to be unless you frighten him with that long face of yours. He's shot through the right lung, but as lung wounds go, it's not a bad one, and he'll get all right again in time. You can go and see him, but you can't stop long and you mustn't excite him. I'm just going to give him an injection of morphia."

The inspector recovered breath and turned solemnly

to Sir James Marley.

"Your butler's dead, sir," he said, "and also Mrs. Salter. They didn't even get a mile away. They collided with a tree in Terminus Road when going very fast. The car overturned and caught fire. Slim was apparently killed instantly, but Mrs. Salter was alive when she was pulled out. She died, however, on her way to the hospital. I've just come from there."

Sir James put his arm round his wife and held her to

him.

And that night Larose had a strange dream. dream the was in a big cathedral and the roof was so high that it was lost in the shadows. There were wide spaces

all around him and the slightest sounds gave back echoes. It was very dark but in one corner, far away, a small lamp was burning. Every now and then a hooded figure would glide up and, bending over him, would murmur something and then glide away again.

His sleep was very troubled and he saw many faces.

Once too, he heard a faint rustling close near him and he smelt something that he had smelt a thousand years ago. It seemed like the smell of Havana cigars. Not the smell of a cigar burning but the heavy scent that clings to a man's clothing when it is his habit to smoke much.

He pondered hours over that smell and tried to recall all those whom he had known in his past life who smoked

Havana cigars.

Then suddenly he was stung in the arm and the pain broke so unexpectedly into his dream that he heard himself cry out. Then there was a tinkle as of something that had fallen to the floor, he felt a draught of cold air and a woman glided up and bent over him.

"It's all right," she said gently. "You're quite all

right." And he sank into his dream again.

And then followed for Larose long weeks of acute physical distress. Sepsis supervened, an operation had to be performed, and for days his condition was critical.

But he had no cares, for the goddess of the poppy had flung her mantle over him and he was always under the influence of morphia. It was nothing to him, then, whether he lived or died, and all the troubles of the world were of no moment to him. He was derelict in some forgotten backwater, with the current of the great river of life passing him by. He took little notice of anybody and all he wanted was to keep his eyes closed and be left alone.

But he had a dim recognition of Lady Marley and her Madonna face peered out often to him from the haze of his opiate dreams. She used to sit by him and place her cool hand upon his forehead, and talk to him in a low,

gentle voice that he thought was like the murmuring of a stream.

But these days of dreadful sickness passed at last, the fever died, and gradually, very gradually, he took hold of life and began to be interested in persons and things

again.

Then when he began to get really better, Lady Marley came every morning and afternoon to spend some time with him. She would tell him all the news or read to him and often she brought her sewing into his room. She was making garments of a very small size and he loved to watch her face as she bent over her work.

She told him of the many people who had rung up to enquire after him: Lady Drews, Gentry Wardle, and others, who, at one time, he had marked down for the

gallows.

She told him how Dr. Merryweather had been very ill too. He had gone to his home in Devonshire and had had a bad heart seizure there. He would never be the same man again, she said, and would always have to avoid any excitement, for at any time now excitement might

prove fatal to him.

Then Sir James Marley used to visit him a lot and they played chess and had long conversations together. The detective found Sir James a very different man now to the cold and haughty baronet he had known formerly. The master of Southdown Court was now all kindness and sympathy and when he and Lady Marley happened to be in the room together, they had so thrown off all reserve that they made no pretence now of hiding how much in love they were with each other.

They treated Larose as if he were quite an old friend,

and as an equal in every way.

One thing, however, they never referred to—the death of Captain Dane—and made no mention of anything that had led up to the injury to the detective.

Then Inspector Roberts looked in often and told him

everything that was happening.

Binks had made a full confession of all the burglaries

and would be tried at the forthcoming Lewes Assizes. He would probably get five years. It was Gentry Wardle's car that the butler had taken that night and it had been burnt almost to a cinder. A few things, however, had been salvaged from it and one of them had been a jewel case which turned out to be Mrs. Culloden's. They had made searching enquiries into Slim's antecedents but had only been able to find out one thing and that was that he was not Slim at all. The real Slim was living at Forest Gate and was a bookmaker. Colonel Mead had called at the police station and, very pompous and purple of face as usual, had asked if Larose had any relations depending upon him, because if so, he, Colonel Mead, was prepared to there and then write out a cheque for a hundred guineas. He had added that Larose had no idea how English gentlefolk conducted their financial affairs.

"And I don't quite know, Mr. Larose," remarked the inspector smilingly, one day towards the end of the detective's convalescence, "whether, in this case, you have been quite altogether 'the man who never failed.' The murderer is dead right enough but "—and he shook

his head slowly—" he wasn't our kill."

"Bloodthirsty man!" laughed Larose. "What does

it matter?"

"A lot," replied the inspector sharply. "The law must have its pound of flesh, and the murder of Captain Dane will now go down to history as an undiscovered crime. You and I know who was the murderer and the public, too, hold the same opinion about the butler, but "—he shrugged his shoulders—"there was no official verdict. No one was arraigned and condemned."

But Larose made no comment, for in spite of the unexpectedly murderous light in which the butler had shown himself by shooting him down in the drive, the detective was still very far from believing that the man

had been the actual murderer of Captain Dane.

Larose had had ample time for thought during the long and dragging days of his convalescence and, many

times reviewing in minute detail everything that had happened, the conviction had been gradually forced upon him that he had made one deplorable omission in

his handling of the investigation.

He had failed altogether to appreciate the significance of the actions of Dr. Merryweather when, if he had taken sufficient thought, their meaning should have been quite clear to him, and he was longing for the time when he would be able to go downstairs again and put a theory he had now formed, to the test.

Times without number he had gone over everything that had related to Dr. Merryweather and finally all his surmises had crystallized into one strange and startling

conclusion.

The doctor, upon the night when Captain Dane had been killed in a moment of panic, had left upon the scene of the murder some highly incriminating piece of evidence which he had not succeeded in recovering later, simply because the positions of the big settees had been changed.

The detective had reasoned it all out in this way.

When the billiard-room had been closed to everyone by the police, the doctor had been desperately anxious to get in, and it could only have been to accomplish some urgent and definite purpose. But he had not managed to effect an entry, and then, when later the billiard-room had been thrown open again and he had free access to it, his subsequent manner showed convincingly that he had not obtained what he wanted. He had then, apparently, become obsessed with the quite erroneous belief that he, Larose, had come into possession of it and the idea had so disconcerted him, that he had first pleaded for clemency and then, seeing no likelihood of his plea being listened to, he had been upon the point of making a violent attack upon him, Larose, with that spear.

The detective was quite certain that he was now reasoning correctly, for if Dr. Merryweather had been wanting something he had left behind him in the billiardroom, there was no reason why he should not have

obtained it, in the light of the fact that nothing had been taken from there except the body of the dead man, which

the doctor of course knew had gone.

No, nothing had happened that could have thwarted Dr. Merryweather except that the settees had been all moved round upon that morning when the inspector had been questioning those members of the house-party. And that meant that the doctor must have made a hidingplace for something somewhere in one of those settees, and that being so, it could only be that he had thrust it down between the seat and the back. Then, returning subsequently to recover what he had hidden, he had searched the wrong settee and the mistake he was making had never occurred to him.

One morning, when the police surgeon had made his customary examination, he nodded his head smilingly.

"Well, young man," he said, "you've caused us a lot of anxiety, but I think I can say now that you are finally out of the wood. To-morrow, if there's any sun you can go outside and sit in it." He shook his finger warn-"But mind, don't go and over-exert yourself.

Take things easily and find your feet gradually."

The detective's heart beat a little quicker, for now it would not be long, he realized, before he would obtain the opportunity he wanted of visiting the billiard-room.

But still the opportunity did not come nearly so soon as he had expected it for, once downstairs, it was several days before he was left alone.

Either the nurse was with him or Lady Marley was hovering about, or Sir James was considering it his duty

to amuse him.

But one afternoon, he at last got his chance and left by himself for a few minutes, he crept with tottering steps up the passage that led to the billiard-room. His excitement was so great that he could hardly get his breath.

"My last card," he panted, "and everything depends upon it. If I fail now, I have lost touch for ever with the

killer of Captain Dane."

He opened the door very gently and pulled aside the curtain. Then his eyes opened very wide, his jaw dropped, and it was all he could do to stifle a cry. His dismay was quite overwhelming him.

The leather settees were no longer there and in their

places were four tapestry covered ones.

The nature of Larose was a buoyant one and he was never despondent for long. Good fortune, to him, was not a coy maid to be wooed with soft words and beseeching eyes, but rather a vixen to be roughly handled with a determination greater than her own.

So, his first disappointment over, he set about speculating as to where the track could be picked up

again.

He would have liked to have approached Sir James or Lady Marley direct, but as he was quite aware they were now convinced that only their late butler could have cleared up the mystery surrounding the death of Captain Dane, and as he knew, too, from their silence, that they had no wish to refer again to the scandal that had fallen upon their house, he took the first opportunity he could of questioning the parlourmaid, Betty Yates, instead.

"What happened to those settees in the billiard-room, Betty?" he whispered, when she passed him as he was

lying back in a chair in the hall.

"The master had them all taken away," she whispered back, "a few days after the visitors had gone."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the detective, "but who took

them?"

"Oh, Jones and Tulley, the furniture people in the town," she replied, "and they supplied these other ones instead."

He thought for a long while after she had left him, and then resolved upon the boldest course. He shut himself in the telephone cabinet and rang up Jones & Tulley.

"I'm speaking for Sir James Marley," he fibbed, "from Southdown Court. What became of those four leather settees you took away from here?" "We sent them to our Brighton branch," was the reply, "and they were disposed of there."

"They were sold, then?" asked the detective.

"Oh, yes, practically at once. We marked them down to a moderate figure and the Regency Club took them."

"Thank you," said Larose and rang off. That night for the first time he had dinner with Sir James and Lady Marley downstairs, and in the course of the meal, he brought the conversation round casually to the subject of clubs, with the object apparently of comparing English clubs with those in Australia.

"Yes," commented Sir James; "but, of course, everything has altered since the war. There are very few clubs now that will deny membership to anyone in the possession of money, provided, of course, that he is

reputable and all that."

"You've a good club here?" asked the detective.

"Excellent," replied Sir James.

"And Brighton, I suppose, too," went on Larose, contains some good ones? Which is supposed to be the best there?"

The baronet thought for a moment. "Well, I suppose that the Regency is," he said. "It's considered very exclusive and at any rate it has the best position, being on the sea-front. Its secretary is a retired army man, and he runs it very well."

Larose put a few more guarded questions and then

switched off the conversation in other channels.

"Now I must pay a visit to that club as quickly as possible," he remarked to himself when he was upstairs in his room again and preparing for bed, "and I won't get any official help either. After all, although I don't think so, I may have made another bloomer and I don't want to make myself ridiculous." He frowned. "There's been too much already about 'the man who never failed 'business."

A week later he left the Court, and after a regretful parting with Lady Marley, it was Sir James himself who

drove him down to the railway station.

The baronet had offered to drive him the whole way to London but Larose had put him off with the excuse that he was going through to the East Coast to stay a couple of weeks or so with a friend at Cromer.

Sir James waited by the train until it was actually in

motion and then thrust a letter through the window.

"Just read that," he called out smilingly. "Good luck to you and be sure to look us up whenever you get the chance. You'll always be most welcome."

Larose opened the envelope and frowned. It contained a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds.

DEAR MR. LAROSE [he read],

Will you oblige me by accepting the enclosed, not for one moment considered as adequate compensation for the suffering you have gone through, but just as a token of my regret for the injury you received at the hands of a servant in my employ.

With our united regards,
Sincerely yours,
JAMES MARLEY."

The detective sighed. "And it will be deuced awkward to return it to him," he remarked, "in a letter with the postmark Brighton."

CHAPTER XV

THE CRAFT OF LAROSE

AROSE was considerably annoyed with Inspector Roberts, for the latter had made what would have been in the ordinary way a most easy and

simple task a decidedly difficult one.

But for the inspector's ever-ready gibe about "the man who never failed" and his continued refusal to believe that anyone else but the butler could have been the killer of Captain Dane, Larose would have gone straight to the authorities in Brighton and through them have obtained permission from the Regency Club people to search the leather settees that had formerly reposed in the billiardroom of Southdown Court.

He had, however, no mind to do that now, for it would have meant taking the inspector into his confidence again, and arguing all anew the suspicious actions of Dr. Merryweather, and worse still—in the event of the detective finding nothing hidden in one of the settees—of exposing him still further to the amusement of the

head of the Eastbourne police.

Of course he might have approached the Brighton people direct, but then it would have looked peculiar his coming with no introduction from Inspector Roberts, and telephone communications between the two towns

would consequently have speedily followed.

So the detective had decided to carry out the search upon his own, and to trust to his mother wit to get into the Regency Club somehow, locate the settees, and make a search of them when alone. It thrilled him not a little when he had come finally to this decision, for it was in his temperament to obtain as sincere pleasure in pitting himself against the established forces of law and order, as against the secrecy and guilt of those who worked in the underworld.

"You would have made a most efficient and resourceful criminal, Gilbert," he often grinned to himself, "and it is just Fate that it happens your life's work lies upon

the side of the law."

So duly arriving in Brighton, he put up at a small hotel near the railway station, and then proceeded to make a reconnaissance of the mighty and select Regency Club.

As Sir James Marley had informed him, he found it on the promenade, facing the sea, and it was a large building, or rather three buildings made into one. It consisted of three substantial four-storied houses of the mid-Victorian period, and everything about it spoke of lordly and staid respectability.

Massively built, it scorned bow-windows, and had the old-fashioned areas in front, leading down to the

kitchen regions.

It suggested decorum and comfort; big sirloins of

beef and saddle of mutton with red currant jelly.

The detective settled himself down upon one of the seats on the promenade in front of it, and for a couple of hours and more took stock of all that was going on.

Numbers of expensive-looking cars drove up, depositing men of distinguished appearance and well-cut clothes, and between two and four there was a constant stream

of arrivals passing through the doors.

"Mostly old birds," remarked the detective presently, but of very good class. A fair sprinkling of naval and military folk, and that last old chap, with his legs inclined to be bandy, must have been an admiral at the very least. All turning up for their little daily gamble, I suppose. Bridge at half a crown a hundred, most probably."

About half-past four a boy hurried in with a bundle of newspapers, and Larose, feeling stiff and cold from sitting

about for so long, rose up and followed him.

The boy did not, however, go very far, for at the end of the club buildings he turned round the corner into a narrow side street, and about fifty yards down, disappeared into a small newsagent's and tobacco shop.

"Good," said Larose; "they evidently supply the papers and I may pick up something there." And he

followed in after the boy.

The proprietor of the shop, wizen-faced, spare and very short of stature, immediately approached. He had every stamp upon him of an old-time jockey.

The detective bought a couple of packets of cigarettes and a copy of Sporting Life. Then he paused a moment

"When are the next Brighton races?" he asked.

"Do you happen to remember?"

"Three weeks to-morrow," replied the little man. He eyed the detective shrewdly. "A stranger here?"
"Yes," replied Larose smiling, "I come from Australia."

"Oh, from Australia," remarked the man, interested at once. "You've got some good horses there. I suppose you've seen Phar Lap."

'Yes," laughed Larose, "and backed him too in a

double once. Two hundred and eighty to one."

"Gee!" exclaimed the man, "that was a good bet." He nodded his head. "I knew something about horses. I was a jock myself once."

The detective professed great interest and they chatted

upon racing subjects for quite a little time.

"Well," said Larose at last, preparing to depart, "I shall be here for a few weeks and I'll come round and see you again." He smiled. "Perhaps you'll be able to give me a winner or two." He looked across the narrow street. "How dark that high building makes your shop. What is that place?"

"The Regency Club," replied the man, and he added proudly: "I supply all their papers there."

"A sporting club?" suggested Larose.

"Oh, no," said the man as if greatly shocked. "All high and mighty and great nobs there. The swellest club in all Brighton. It's terrible difficult to get in." He laughed. "Not that it hasn't got some good sports though. One of the hall porters, the night one "-his voice dropped to an awed whisper-" backed Kessaway last Saturday at fifty to one. Had a couple of dollars on her too. I know because I put them on for him and got the money. Very good judge, that chap. He picks 'em out well."

Larose expressed astonishment at the good fortune of the night porter of the Regency Club and the conversation was renewed again; then, a few minutes later, he suggested an adjournment to a public-house that he

had noticed a few doors lower down the street.

The ex-jockey was quite agreeable and, leaving the boy in charge of the shop, at once accompanied the

detective to the bar of the One and All.

A couple of beers, each with a little dash of gin, seemed to make the small frame of the man expand visibly, and bringing the conversation round to the Regency Club again, Larose extracted a lot of interesting information.

They took three copies of most of the morning papers there, and always paid the bill on the tick, the first Wednesday in every month. The place had recently been all done up inside and new carpets put in. They had a cook too, a blooming chef, who, it was reported,

was paid about six hundred quid a year.

They had a big staff, about forty. No, they only had two billiard-tables. Billiards were not too popular with people nowadays. It was all "blasted cards." They played sometimes until two or three in the morning, and practically the club was never shut. They had a night porter, of course, and he came on at nine and stopped until seven the next morning. Of course the billiardroom was shut at eleven every night. That was the law. The marker was a friend of his and often called in for fags as he came off duty. They had a lot of people with handles to their names in the club and they were real

top-notchers and all that. All the staff got good tips at Christmas and a fortnight's holiday every year.

The detective parted with his new friend at length and strolled back in front of the club again. It was now

getting on for six o'clock.

Presently three men came out of the club together and he followed closely after them, trying to pick up scraps of their conversation as they went along. One of them was tall and erect, and he heard the others address him as "General." They separated when a few hundred yards from the club, and the tall, erect one, went off in the direction of the Pavilion. He went up the steps of a house opposite to the gardens and let himself in with a latchkey.

It was Steyne Street, and the detective took a note of the number—number seventeen. Then he went into a hotel, and borrowing a directory looked up who lived at 17 Steyne Street. He saw it was a General Crook.

"Good!," he remarked to himself, "then old Crook is a friend of mine for the moment and, bless his old heart, I'll make good use of him." He considered for a moment. "Now, he looks an old boy who would take care of himself, and I don't suppose, therefore, that he'll go giddying about to-night. He'll stop at home after dinner and warm his toes before the fire. I remember those other sparks said "Good night" to him just now, and that evidently meant they didn't expect to see him again this side of to-morrow. No, I'll risk it anyhow and call for him at the club to-night. If he is there I'll say I'm a friend of Colonel Mead and am wondering where old Mead is now. I can say I've heard Mead talk of him."

The detective dined at his own hotel and during the meal carefully went over the details of his plan for the

night.

"Now I will get to that club," he said to himself, "just a few minutes before nine, before the night porter comes on duty. I will ask for General Crook and say that the old bean has arranged to meet me there about nine o'clock. I shall be shown, of course, into the visitors' room, but directly I am left alone, or at any rate before there is time for the night porter to become acquainted with me, I will make my way at once to one of the other floors and find some place of retreat. Thus, if the night porter has been told about me and comes to notice the visitors' room is empty, he may naturally believe that the gallant general has been in to fetch me. On the other hand, the porter going off duty may have omitted to mention anything about me at all."

The detective chuckled and looked very pleased, as if anticipating some great adventure. "Then," he went on, "then I shall have to trust to my good fortune and to that resource that I have always endeavoured to cultivate during the course of my wicked life." He sighed. "But I shall have to be parted from my pistol to-night, for it would never do to be caught with a gun upon me."

So at exactly seven minutes to nine, spick and span, and carrying himself haughtily, he pushed his way through the swing-doors of the Regency Club and entered the hall.

"Dr. Shandy," he announced to the hall porter, elevating his chin very high in the air, "and I was to meet General Crook here at nine o'clock."

"Very good, sir," replied the porter. "If you come into the visitors' room, I'll see if General Crook is in."

Larose was shown into a small room leading out of the hall, and the porter went away, to return, however, in a couple of minutes or so, with the information that the general had not yet arrived.

"All right," nodded the detective carelessly, "then

I'll wait," and the porter at once retired.

And Larose certainly did wait until about ten minutes after nine, and then, judging that the change of porters would have been effected, he walked boldly out of the visitors' room, and made his way up a broad flight of stairs that he saw opposite to him. He had left his hat behind, well pushed back, under a small settee.

He was uncertain as to the course of any of his next

movements, but his idea was first to locate the leather

settees, and that he very soon did.

Gaining the first floor, he approached to where he knew from the information derived from the ex-jockey newsagent, the billiard-room must be, and at once heard the familiar click of ivory balls and saw in front of him a green baize door with a little window let into it, through which all would-be entrants were supposed first to look, so as not to walk in when a player was making his stroke.

He took a peep and then his heart gave a big bound. Right in front of him were the leather settees and they

seemed to him like old friends.

"Splendid," he whispered. "Now I wonder if they

lock this door at nights."

And then he was of opinion that they did, for, glancing down at the keyhole to try and gain some idea as to whether the lock would be easy to pick, he perceived the key itself had been left in the door.

He would have liked to have stood still and rub his hands in satisfaction, but aware that every moment he was in danger, he softly drew the key out of the keyhole, and pocketing it quickly made his way up yet another

flight of stairs.

He must then, he knew, be among the sleepingquarters of any residing members, and trusting that no one would have retired by then, he proceeded to quietly open one door after another. Yes, they were all bedrooms and all alike, and one, two, three, four, up to ten were in use judging from the clothing or articles of toilet that he saw lying about them when he switched on his little electric torch.

But number eleven had no personal effects in it anywhere, and the detective was minded to bespeak it at

once.

"I shall have to hide on the floor under the bed," he exclaimed ruefully, "and if anyone is shown in and settles down to sleep here, to say the least of it, it will be deuced awkward. I must have some line of retreat."

He considered for a moment and then prospected

Sur James

further down the corridor. There were twenty bedrooms and apparently only numbers eleven, thirteen and nineteen were going to be without their occupants

that night.

"Number thirteen, please, porter," he grinned, "and thank goodness some people are still superstitious. The number may perhaps put someone off. At any rate, it won't make anyone more inclined to take it. And I'm not going under the bed either," he went on. "I'm going to rest in it just like an ordinary respectable person, and if the night porter does attempt to show anyone else in, I'll raise the very devil of a row. That jockey chap said there were over five hundred members here, and the porter can't possibly remember all that number of faces, as they would look in bed."

He nodded his head. "And, of course, if this room is marked as being empty upon the notice-paper which is undoubtedly provided for him every night when he comes on duty—well, he'll naturally think a mistake's been made, and wait until the morning to investigate it."

The detective stroked his chin doubtfully. "But I ought to have a few belongings lying about here to give colour to the fact that I'm occupying the room, and I shall want a dressing-gown to go prowling about in safety during the night." He sighed. "Well, here goes. I'll have to borrow a bit of something from the other rooms."

And so from one bedroom he borrowed a hair brush, from another a comb, from another a couple of spare ties, and from another a sports cap and a pair of shoes. Everyone contributed something, and from the last room he took a dressing-gown out of a cupboard, devoutly hoping that its owner would not want it before the morning.

And everything he arranged about the room he had chosen in such a way that anyone entering unexpectedly would get the idea at once that it was being occupied in a perfectly legitimate manner.

As an additional precaution, he took out the electric

bulb hanging down in the middle of the room and scraped the contact points so that it was out of action, leaving only the reading light by the side of the bed to show up should the switch be turned on from the side of the door.

"A dim religious light is all I want," he grinned, and then they won't see too much, too quickly."

It was then about half-past nine and, leaving the door unbolted, he got into bed and switching off the light pulled the counterpane up round his neck and prepared to pass the time, with what patience he could, until he

would judge that everyone had gone to bed.

"And it's a blessing it's Saturday," he murmured sleepily, "and they won't be playing cards too late to-night. Really, some conventions must be most helpful to the criminal classes. The Day of Rest has always been a favoured one for the safe-blower and breakers-in of offices." He closed his eyes. "And now I'll have a little nap, for really I'm in no more danger asleep than awake, and I'm sure I should wake up in less than two hours."

But he had not slept for quite two hours when the door opened abruptly, and there was the sound of the click of the switch by the door, followed by a sharp exclamation from someone.

Instantly, he was awake and alert, and he pressed on the switch of the bedside light, which he had been retaining in his hand.

He only just lifted up his head, however, and took care

not to turn his face towards the light.

"What's up? What's up?" he ejaculated crossly. "What the devil do you want?"

He saw a man in the hall porter's uniform standing by the door and behind him a portly individual with an eye-glass, and very red of face. The porter was carrying a small portmanteau and he looked very surprised.

"Beg pardon, sir, beg pardon," he said most respectfully, "but I didn't know this room was occupied. They must have forgotten to chalk it up downstairs."

preceded by the portly man he at once went out and closed the door.

"The boldest plan is always the best," remarked the detective. "Kiss the girl and then ask her afterwards." He made a grimace. "But there'll be no more sleep for me until I get home to my proper bed."

So he lay back upon the pillow and tried to count up the opening and closing of seventeen doors, but some of the members came up in batches, and he soon relinquished

that idea.

Half an hour after midnight, however, all had been silence for more than a quarter of an hour, and he deemed it would now be safe to leave his room, so donning the dressing-gown over his clothes and, as an afterthought, tucking the sports cap in one of the pockets, he opened the door very gently and peered down the corridor. There was a light shining at the far end but no one was in sight.

He tiptoed to the banisters and looked over. Still no one, but down below, he could see a bright light

shining in the hall.

He ran down the stairs as silently as a cat, and then up the heavily-carpeted corridor until he came to the billiard-room door. Then his heart began to trouble

him and he could feel it bumping hard.

Very softly he turned the handle and, as he expected, the door yielded to his touch. Holding his breath he crept into the room, and then he pulled the door to behind him, and for a long minute stood motionless in the darkness.

A rush of memories was surging through him.

He was back again, as in those months ago, in the billiard-room of Southdown Court. He was hot upon the trail of the assassin and almost, he felt he was in the presence of the dead.

He pulled himself together with an effort and switched on his torch. The leather settees were just as they had been in Eastbourne, two on each side of the two billiard-

tables.

He approached the first one and thrust his hand down between the seat and the back. The back fitted very closely and he knelt upon the seat and pressed it down to provide more room for his hand. He passed his hand all along but he could feel nothing.

He approached the next settee and thrust his hand down as before and then—he bit upon his lip that he

should make no cry.

His hand had come in contact with a bulky object.

He hesitated a moment, and then with some difficulty, for it was tightly wedged in its hiding-place, dragged out what he had felt. He flashed the light upon it.

"The banknotes!" he gasped. "The banknotes!

Then they were what he was trying to get."

He stood still, staring at them incredulously. They were doubled in two, with no band or wrapping upon them. Just a thick wad of banknotes pressed tightly together.

Then he noticed, almost mechanically, that there was a crushed sheet of note-paper among them and he pulled

it out.

He held his torch to it, and then—his face went pale and clammy, his eyes took on a look of horrible surprise, and his hands shook as if he had been seized suddenly with an ague.

"Good God!" he gasped. "Good God!"

It was minutes then—hours it seemed to him—that he remained in the pitch darkness there. He had switched off his torch and he lay back upon the settee, oblivious to everything but the writing on that paper.

He was faced with a great tragedy, and with perhaps

the most astounding surprise of his whole career.

He was roused from his reverie at last by the hooting of a motor in the road below and with a start he remembered where he was, and what the night still held for him to do.

He had to get out of the building unseen and he had

no certain idea as to how he was going to do it.

He thrust the banknotes and the sheet of paper

carefully into the breast pocket of his coat, and then turning up the collar of the dressing-gown, he tiptoed out of the room and into the passage.

The whole place was as silent as the grave.

"Now I'll go down to the basement," he whispered, "and get out through some window there. There was a door, too, I noticed opening into that side street." He frowned uneasily. "But I must be careful not to arouse any of the staff. Some of them may be sleeping down there."

He made his way softly down the stairs and then crouching until his head was only a few inches above the level of the floor, he peeped cautiously round the corner into the front hall. He had a good view then of the hall

porter.

The man was sitting back in an arm-chair and reading

a newspaper.

"And it may be hours," muttered the detective, before he thinks of having a nap, and then it'd be a hundred to one against my opening that front door without his waking up. No—through the basement will be the safer way for me."

But a minute later he got a most unpleasant surprise for, creeping down the passage that, from the lay-out of the building, could only lead to the stairs descending to the basement, he found himself brought up against a big door and—the door was locked with a stout Yale lock.

"Whew!," he whistled softly. "But that's awkward, and it seems the only way out will be by the hall door."

He tiptoed back and peered round again at the porter. "Now if I could only get him away for ten seconds," he thought, "I should be quite all right. I wonder if I could pug him up with some tale."

But a hard stare at the all-unconscious hall porter did not inspire much hope for the man had a strong, shrewd face, and did not look as if he would be easily taken in.

"Nothing doing," whispered Larose decisively. "I daren't try a bluff on him for a second time." He nodded his head. "Yes, I must go upstairs again and see if I can

get out of any window there. If I touch one of these on this floor he'll hear me at once."

But peering round a corner of one of the blinds of the billiard-room, the possibilities of escape again looked black, for not only was there a drop of quite thirty feet to the bottom of the area, but also, not a hundred yards away

were parked two waiting taxis on a stand.

"And even if I do make a rope of some sheets and climb down"—he scowled—"it will be almost a miracle if no one sees me with that big arc light there, shining right in front. And the road's by no means deserted, at any rate as yet. There's a courting couple still upon that seat and another upon that breakwater."

His difficulties mounted up for a policeman now appeared in sight, walking with slow and measured tread.

"And it's probably his regular beat," sighed Larose,

"and he'll be tramping up and down here all night."
For quite a quarter of an hour he remained at his post looking out, and never at any time was the road quite empty. Motors went gliding by, night-revellers passed noisily along the promenade, one of the taxis picked up a fare, and once again the policeman appeared.

The detective's sighs became deeper and deeper, and then suddenly a grin came into his face and he clicked his

fingers together softly.
"I'll try it," he whispered. "That copper looks

quite an intelligent fellow."

He moved quickly away from the window and took down two cues out of the rack and also the big rest. All of them he leant up against one of the blinds. Then he darted to the door and almost with one sweep of his wrist pressed down all the switches. Instantly the long room was flooded in light.

Losing not one second of time, he next darted out into the corridor and crept noiselessly down the stairs. his head again almost level with the floor, he looked

round at the porter.

The man was still in the arm-chair and now with a pink newspaper spread out upon his knees, and with a most

studious expression on his face, he was pencilling into a little book that he was holding in his hand. Every now and again he sucked at the pencil as if some grave doubt were assailing him.

"Picking winners!" ejaculated the detective. "He's looking for another Kessaway. Well, good luck to him

anyhow."

Five—ten minutes passed, and Larose was beginning to feel anxious, when suddenly a bell buzzed sharply in the hall. Marighan

The porter jerked up his head with a frown and then quickly folding up his pink newspaper and thrusting it into his pocket, he rose to his feet and walked briskly

towards the hall door.

His back was now towards Larose, and like lightning the detective sprang across the hall into the visitors' He hid behind the door there and looked through the crack.

The porter opened the hall door and Larose heard a

stern voice.

"What are the lights on in your billiard-room for?" asked someone gruffly. "You know it's a breach of the law."

"Lights on in the billiard-room!" ejaculated the hall sharply, "and they've been off, as usual, since eleven o'clock."

"Well, they're on now," went on the stern voice, "and someone's using the tables, too, for I can see the shadows of some of the cues against the blind." A big policeman thrust his way into the hall. "I'll go up there."

"My intelligent friend from the promenade," whispered Larose. "I was quite right. I thought he'd

notice them."

With no further parley but with a contemptuous shrug of his broad shoulders, the porter closed the door behind the policeman and then proceeded to follow him up the hall.

They disappeared into the passage and the detective

heard them mounting the stairs.

With a quick movement he flung off his dressing-gown, and retrieving the hat that he had thrust under the settee, tiptoed to the hall door and opening it very quietly passed into the street. He had pulled the door to behind him, but had not closed it.

He walked carelessly and with no appearance of hurry until he had turned into the side street at the end of the club buildings, then he at once quickened his pace

considerably.

"So simple, so very simple, Gilbert my boy," he smiled to himself. He chuckled delightedly. "But it

wasn't everyone who would have thought of it."

He gained his hotel without adventure and disturbing the occupations of yet another night porter, in less than twenty minutes from the time he had left the Regency Club, was in bed and trying to get to sleep.

But it was hours before sleep came.

In the meanwhile, the sportingly inclined hall porter of the Regency Club was having a very unpleasant time.

He had, of course, found the billiard-room as the policeman had asserted, with all the lights on, and very puzzled himself he had nevertheless tried to pass it over as a practical joke to the scornfully incredulous officer of the law.

"You'll hear from us to-morrow," said the policeman, producing a fat note-book from his pocket and proceeding to make voluminous notes. "And later you'll have an opportunity no doubt of explaining to his worship what a funny crowd your members are."

They descended to the hall and the disgusted porter was about to open the door to let the policeman out

when, to his amazement, he found it already open.

"Someone's been here," he almost shouted. "Look, the door's open."

"What about it?" asked the policeman stolidly.

"Well, I shut it, didn't I," exclaimed the porter,

"directly you'd come in? You saw me do it."

The policeman thought for a moment and nodded rather reluctantly, so it seemed, as if unwilling to concede any point whatsoever to a servant in the employ of breakers of the law.

The porter instantly shut the door and this time he shot the bolt as well. Then he grabbed the policeman

by the arm.

"Don't go," he whispered hoarsely. "I may want you. There's been some johnnies in the club to-night that oughtn't to have been and I'm just tumbling to it now." And followed by the puzzled policeman he dashed into the visitors' room and switched on the lights.

The room was empty, and jerking his head down under the various articles of furniture, he found under one of the settees an article of attire that proved to be a dressing-

gown.

"Now this here is suspicious," he exclaimed, "this dressing-gown! Oh the devil"—and his eyes almost started from his head—" why, I've seen this already to-night, on the end of a bed where a man was sleeping in a room which was supposed to be unoccupied."

And then with his eye upon the stairs so that no one could escape, if they had not already done so, he gave a quick whispered account to the policeman of the two significant things that had happened since he had come

on duty that night.

A caller who had been shown into the visitors' room earlier in the night to await the coming, so he said, of a most respected member of the club, General Crook, had mysteriously disappeared, and at half-past eleven, a man who he believed now was a stranger, was in possession of a bedroom when there was no notification of the fact in the nightly register of the club.

The policeman was impressed and together they crept upstairs to bedroom Number thirteen, to find, however, as the porter had expected, that the bird had flown.

"We've both been fooled, Constable," he said bitterly,

"and he just switched on those lights to make you come and get me away from the hall so that he could slip out. We shan't know until the morning, what he's been up to, but it looks as if he'd got what he wanted, anyhow."

And not by any means the least annoyance of the night was the exasperation, most forcibly expressed, when the gallant general was rung up at 2.22 a.m.—police time—to find out if he had made an appointment for 9 p.m. to

meet a Dr. Shandy at the Regency Club.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRAGEDY OF LIFE

Ivybridge by the Plymouth Express.

He had passed through a period of great mental stress since his discovery in the billiard-room of the Regency Club, but he had now steeled his heart against all sentiment and was going down into Devonshire to investigate the previous relations of Lady Marley with Captain Dane, when she had been Sonia Cator and he had been Captain Bonning.

He was alone in a carriage and he took a half-sheet of note-paper from the wallet in his pocket and, although he knew every word now by heart, for the hundredth time read through the few lines in the bold handwriting

of Sir James Marley.

After consideration I will not trust myself to have speech with you for, if I see you, I shall kill you. Leave here before eight this morning. Ring up the lodge and you can be driven to the station. Understand—if I see you I will kill you.

The detective sighed heavily. Yes, how convincingly these few lines pointed to the fact that it was Sir James Marley who had killed Captain Dane, although, as evidenced by them, he had not deliberately intended to do so. He had warned Dane to leave the Court by the early morning and then—by some malign whim of Fate—

the two had unexpectedly been brought together in the dead of night, and the baronet had kept his promise and killed his one-time friend.

And the motive?

It could only be that Captain Dane had, at one time or other, done some deadly wrong to Lady Marley, and her

husband was avenging it.

Still, certainly it had been no outright murder that had eventuated upon them standing face to face, and Larose was sure that he could follow pretty closely all that had

happened.

There had been a quarrel first, and then no doubt, roused to fury, Sir James had struck the captain a blow. That would account for the small wound upon the lobe of the ear as if Dane had been hit with the open hand, for the signet-ring the baronet always wore would cause an

abrasion exactly such as that.

Then in ungovernable rage at the blow and probably realizing that with his maimed arm he could not strike back in a similar fashion, Dane had darted for the nearest weapon he could lay his hands upon and he had seized that Malay knife. Sir James had sprung forward to anticipate the attack that he saw was coming and then, to save himself, most probably he had struck the fatal blow.

Yes, Sir James Marley, when he came up for trial, as he undoubtedly would now, would be able to put forward a strong defence, and it did not seem at all improbable, considering all the circumstances, that a verdict of justifiable homicide would be recorded.

It would be a dreadful scandal, of course, for the house of Marley, but it would have to be faced, nevertheless.

And then the detective, to keep himself from dwelling upon the possible consequences to Lady Marley, began again to consider other aspects of the case and he was at once, as he always was when he attempted to sum up everything, plunged into mists of dark and puzzled doubt.

How did the letter, along with the banknotes,

ever come to have been hidden in that settee in the billiard-room?

As far as the detective could determine, three people, and three people only, should have been aware of the very existence of that letter. Sir James who had written it, Captain Dane for whom it had undoubtedly been intended, and Dr. Merryweather who knew where it had been hidden.

Then who had hidden it?

Had Sir James hidden it after the fatal blow had been struck? No, certainly not, for it had been proved that there must have been a good fire burning in the grate at the time Captain Dane had been killed, and to get rid of it the baronet would have burnt—not hidden it.

Had the captain himself hidden it? Why should he? There was no conceivable reason, surely, why he should

have done so.

Then was it Dr. Merryweather who had hidden it? That certainly seemed most likely for he had been trying to find it again afterwards.

Then the detective proceeded to ask himself another

question.

The baronet and Dr. Merryweather were old friends. Then had they been sharing confidences together and acting in collusion?

But he answered that question very quickly. No, no, a thousand times no. There could have been no

collusion and no confidences either.

Sir James was not the type of man to let anyone fight his battles for him. He was proud and haughty, and his whole bearing all along had been that of one who was in no fear of anyone and who was the imperious master in his own house.

Further, if the baronet were the guilty party and had been aware, as undoubtedly Dr. Merryweather had been, that the incriminating letter was hidden in that settee, he could certainly have obtained it without any difficulty. He had had ample opportunity, for he and the butler had been alone in the billiard-room after the latter had fetched

him down to view the dead body, and he could easily then have sent his servant away upon some errand. He could have sent him to the telephone, for instance, instead of going, as he himself had done, to put through that call to the police.

Larose paused for a long time here and then nodded

his head very solemnly.

No, Dr. Merryweather had known the letter was there and the baronet had not. Therefore, there had been no confidences between them.

And what about Merryweather himself, and how, if he had not killed Captain Dane, had he come to be mixed up

in the matter at all?

That he knew of the existence and the whereabouts of the letter seemed absolutely certain, but why then had

he hugged the knowledge to himself?

He would not have been incriminated in any way by its discovery by the police and yet he could not have been more desperate to get possession of it if it had actually pointed to him as being the killer of Captain Dane.

And what did that little hole in the letter mean, as if

it had been pricked with a pin?

Larose heaved a great sigh. He could be certain of nothing and there must be a flaw in his reasoning somewhere, and until he had more to go upon he must give his mind a rest.

He looked out of the window and tried to interest himself in the passing scenery, but it was quite useless. His was not a temperament that would allow him to take rest half-way, and he returned almost immediately to his troubles.

And then about Lady Marley, what of her? Was she aware that her husband had killed his friend and were they then sharing the guilty secret between them?

Larose paused for a long time here and then he nodded

his head very solemnly.

Yes, whatever secret there was, it was now certainly shared between them. They were very much in love,

as everyone could see, and if the death of Captain Dane lay at her husband's hands, it would have been impossible for him to have hidden it from her. The very tenderness of their attitude towards each other since the night of the tragedy could have only been begot of perfect confidence and to be perfect, the confidence must have been mutual.

Besides, it was undoubtedly Lady Marley who had unloosed the avalanche by something she had told her husband after they had retired to their room that night.

It must have been so, for everything up to then had been friendly between Sir James and the captain. The baronet had proposed the toast of his guest at dinner, and later, he had been heard to express concern that the latter was not feeling well. Then, within the space of one short hour—it could not have been longer—he had found out that Dane had done something that merited death and he was ordering him to leave the house and threatening to kill him.

Then what was the nature of the wrong that Dane

had done to Lady Marley?

With all his sexual mania, the captain could hardly have insulted her to the extent of deserving death at her husband's hands after an acquaintance of barely three days, and besides, Larose was remembering that letter the captain had written the day after he had arrived at Southdown Court.

"I" — something — "pleasant" — something — "will tell"—something—he had picked out upon the blotting-pad, and might not the full sentence have been: "I have had a pleasant surprise but will tell you when I

see you," etc.?

People generally wrote about "surprises" as being pleasant or unpleasant, and not as "nice," "good" or "bad," and if the captain had met with a pleasant surprise when he arrived at Southdown Court was it highly improbable that it was meeting in Lady Marley someone whom he had once known under her maiden name?

And if that were so and, upon the baronet introducing his wife to Captain Dane as a perfect stranger in the hall of Southdown Court, Lady Marley had not at once admitted they had met before, would it not have only been because something had occurred then she would not want anyone to know?

Larose remembered too, that in the letter Betty Yates had sent to her policeman father, she had mentioned that everyone at the Court had seemed bright and happy before the tragedy, except Lady Marley, who had

appeared quiet and anxious.

The detective swallowed hard. "It is terrible when a woman is happily married to have to stir up some scandal in her past life "-he shrugged his shoulders-"but then, as the inspector said, the law must have its pound of flesh. Yes, the beasts in the arena must be fed."

And then, thinking of the inspector, Larose smiled.

What of that gentleman's gibe now about "the man who never failed"? It would be amusing to watch his face when he learnt, as he would soon, that he, Larose, notwithstanding all that he had been through, had never left the trail and that it had led him finally to the goal he had been labouring so patiently to reach.

The train was running into Exeter as the detective crystallized all his considerations into two main con-

clusions.

The demeanour and conduct of Sir James Marley suggested that he was innocent, but the bulk of the evidence pointed to him as being guilty. The conduct of Dr. Merryweather suggested that he was guilty, but the evidence pointed to him as being innocent.

Arriving late in the afternoon at Ivybridge, the detective put up at The Bridge Hotel. He gave his name as Richard Taylor, and said he had come down for a few days' quiet and rest. He made no attempt to pursue any enquiries at once and after dinner went for a walk.

The little town was not spread out over a very wide

area, and he soon came upon the parish church, and seeing it was lighted up, he approached and learnt from an old woman who was entering, that there was a service on at eight o'clock, and it was going to be a choral one.

He sat down at the back and proceeded to watch the congregation come in. There were evidently not going to be many worshippers and they were mostly old men and elderly women. The church, no doubt from motives of economy, was only lighted at the chancel end and in the dim light it looked very beautiful.

The hush was soothing to his nerves, and when the notes of the organ came up very softly, he felt a big lump

rise into his throat.

"And here, little Sonia," ran his sad thoughts, "passed her maiden days. From childhood to womanhood she must have knelt in one of these pews, and all her little world probably centred round those who attended here. She may even have first seen her future husband under this roof and the divine dawn of love may have first broken for her when she was listening, as I am, to the organ now." A mist came before his eyes. "And it is misery, undoubtedly, I am going to bring upon hermisery, dishonour and shame."

The service commenced and he listened with appreciation to the finely modulated voice of the old clergyman

who took it.

"Sonia's father," he whispered, "and she inherited some of her beauty from him. Quite an aristocrat, and not unlike her."

But if Larose was pleased at the appearance of the clergyman, he was not at all enthusiastic about his sermon. It was long and prosy, and obviously very much above the heads of the congregation.

"Most impractical," was his comment, "and would give no certain rule of life to any of his hearers." He shook his head frowningly. "A bad bringing up for

Sonia, if that were all the guidance she had."

Returning to the hotel, he had a drink with the

landlord in the bar and casually brought round the conversation to the service he had just attended.

"Good-looking man, Mr. Cator," he remarked, "and

I suppose he's very well liked in the parish?"

The landlord at first looked puzzled and then he

laughed.

"Oh, that's not Mr. Cator!" he exclaimed. "That's old Barney you heard, and he's a dull old dog. No, he's not too particularly liked. He's too high and mighty and thinks too much of himself. He comes of a very old family." His face beamed. "But Mr. Cator, he's a dear old soul, and would be very popular if he could get about more, but he's almost crippled with rheumatism and has been like it for years. His church is a couple of miles away, in Broom village, off the Plymouth road."

Larose blushed disgustedly at himself. He had made a ridiculous mistake in perceiving any likeness to Lady Marley in the clergyman, and besides, he had spilt all

that sentiment in the wrong place.

The landlord was not averse to a little conversation in the course of which he imparted quite a lot of informa-

tion to the detective.

Yes, the Reverend Mr. Cator was a very fine character, and he had a daughter who had made a wonderful match. She was Lady Marley now, and they were very rich. But anyone would have been pleased to get Miss Sonia for a wife, for she had been one of the most beautiful girls in Devonshire. And it had been quite a romance too. She had lived at the Rectory there, an only child with her parents, seeing no one and with no chance of apparently making any satisfactory marriage. Her parents had been too poor to go out much or entertain and Miss Sonia had been brought up almost like a nun.

Then one day, only last year, down had come a rich baronet to do a bit of fishing, Sir James Marley of East-bourne, and he had stopped with an elderly retired doctor who was a friend of the Cators. The doctor had introduced him to Miss Sonia and it had been a love

match at once. They were engaged within a fortnight

and a month later they had been married.

Yes, the Reverend Cator was a patron of his hotel. He had stopped here with his wife and Miss Sonia for a few days, about three or four years ago, when there had been a fire at the Rectory and the place was being put

right. Very nice people they were.

It was a rule of life with Larose, when he could possibly help it, to never seek for information about two people who were involved in any matter from one and the same individual. It was dangerous, for if it came to the ears of one of them that he had been making enquiries about both, they would naturally know at once that he was associating them together, whereas before, perhaps, they might have been imagining that no one had discovered any connection between them.

So he did not ask anything about Dr. Merryweather from the landlord of The Bridge Hotel and instead, looked for another source of information, finding it very quickly next morning in the person of the local chemist.

Yes, there was a very good doctor in the town, Dr. Butler. Well, there was another doctor in the neighbourhood but he had never practiced. He was a retired specialist from London, a Dr. Merryweather. He was very ill just now, heart trouble, and he lived about three miles away, the other side of Broom. He was very well-off and owned race-horses, but always when at Broom he lived a very quiet life and all the servants he employed were an old man and his wife. Oh, yes, Broom was a very pretty little village, right beside the river. It was well worth seeing and only a little over two miles away.

So off to Broom the detective went, and he considered it quite as pretty as the chemist had said. A typical little Devonshire village, with its narrow lanes, its red roads, and its general air of peace. The church was very old and all ivy-covered and, from the tombstones in the churchyard, many generations of Cators had

served at its altar.

Larose saw nothing of the rector although he hung about the church and the rectory for quite a long time. Then he went into the little inn and got into conversation with the landlady who served him with cider and bread and cheese.

He did not ask anything about Lady Marley or Dr. Merryweather, but he enquired, amongst other things, if many army officers from Plymouth or Okehampton were in the habit of coming to the village for the fishing.

The landlady looked rather amused. No, army folk were not much given to fishing, was her opinion. They liked more bloodthirsty sports than that as a rule, and they came for the otter-hunting sometimes, but she did not remember anyone stopping in the village. There was no accommodation for them, and if they were not staying at one of the houses in the neighbourhood they generally put up at the hotel in Ivybridge. Yes, the church was a very old one and the poor rector was getting old too. No, he had been in poor health for many years, and they'd never had visitors at the rectory which had been a great shame when the daughter, Miss Sonia, was there. Still, as far as she was concerned, it had all come right in the end, because she had married well and was now Lady Marley.

And then Larose asked her point-blank if she had ever heard of a Captain Bonning with a lame arm, and received the reply that he had half expected. No, she

had never seen or heard of him.

The detective took another look at the church in the hope of coming across Lady Marley's father, but meeting with no success in that direction, he walked slowly back

to Ivybridge.

After lunch at the hotel he moved into the bar for a smoke and a talk with the landlord. He soon brought round the conversation to otter-hunting, and remarked casually that he had a cousin in the army who used to go in a lot for it, a couple of years or so back, somewhere in the neighbourhood. His name was Bonning, Captain Bonning, and he suffered from a permanent injury to

his left arm. Did the landlord happen to remember if anyone with that name, with a lame arm, had stopped in the hotel?

But neither the name nor the lame arm struck any chord of memory in the landlord's mind. No, he had no recollection at all, but still the gentleman might have stayed in the hotel, for he, the landlord, had only been there just over two years. His wife might, however, remember, for she'd been the proprietress of the hotel before she married him. She'd been there about ten years. He'd go and ask her about this captain at once.

He left the bar, to return, however, again very quickly. No, his wife emphatically had no recollection of a Captain Bonning nor of any officer with a lame arm either.

And then the detective suddenly caught sight of the face of the landlady herself peering at him in what he thought instantly was a very peculiar manner, through the side of the lightly curtained, glass-panelled door that led out of the bar into the inner region of the hotel. She had a cold, taciturn face, with lips that shut very tightly.

He was not aware that she had seen him before, but he had seen her from his bedroom window that morning, scolding one of the maids in the yard, and now she was giving him a hard and purposeful look-over.
"Hullo, hullo!" he thought, "I've interested her at any rate. Now what does that mean?"

He betrayed no sign of having noticed her and then when he covertly glanced round, a minute or so afterwards, he saw that she was still watching him, and that her face was puckered into a puzzled frown. A few moments later, however, and she had gone.

The detective was certainly impressed, and when he had finished his smoke in the bar, and was taking a slow constitutional through the main street of the little town, he was thinking hard all the time as he walked along.

"Well, Gilbert, my boy," he whispered, "you're always very hopeful, and your geese are always swans.

Still, what did that woman mean by taking such an interest in you when you just asked the simple question, if a man

with a lame arm had ever stopped at her hotel?"
His thoughts ran on. "So Sonia Cator stopped at that hotel once, and wouldn't it be extraordinary if it were there she had met Captain Bonning? Everyone says she had few opportunities of meeting strangers and "—he pulled himself up abruptly—"at any rate, I'll find out the date of that fire at the rectory. It will narrow things down a lot."

He stopped a small boy in the street. "What happens

if there's a fire here, sonny?" he asked.
The boy grinned. "They put it out."

"Who puts it out? Have you got a fire brigade here then?"

"Yes, round the back of the Town Hall," was the

reply.

Larose found the fire station at the place indicated but it was locked up. It was next door, however, to a small garage and he went in there with the excuse that he might want to be driven in to Plymouth on the morrow, and wanted to know what the cost would be.

The man told him, and then the detective remarked casually: "I see you've got a fire brigade here; all

voluntary, I suppose?"

The man nodded. "Yes, we run it among ourselves and I'm the driver of the bus."

"Did you go to that fire at Broom," asked Larose, "that I once happened to read about, at the rectory?"

"Sure," replied the man, "but that was a very small affair and they'd put it out with buckets before we arrived. It only damaged three rooms."

"Now how long ago would that be? Do you remember? Time flies so quickly," mused the detective.

"Four years ago, last September the fifth," was the

instant reply.

"Good gracious!" laughed Larose, "how do you happen to remember the date so exactly?"

The man laughed back. "It was Totnes race-day and

I'd only just got home when the telephone went. Some of our chaps had been having a spot or two, so we were a bit late on the job, and there was a jolly old row." He looked intently at the detective. "You're stopping at The Bridge Hotel, aren't you? I thought you were. I saw you come out yesterday. Well, you ask Mrs. Pound about that fire." He grinned. "She'll tell you the dressing-down she gave us."

"Oh, the landlady at the hotel!" exclaimed Larose, pricking up his ears at once. "What had she got to do with it?"

"She was at the rectory when the fire broke out," replied the man, "spending the day with them. Old friend of the family. She was the maid there for donkey's years before she married her first husband who was the proprietor of The Bridge Hotel."

"Oh, oh," thought Larose, and it was as much as he could do to keep the surprise from his face. "Great

Jupiter, but I've learnt something here!"

Bidding good afternoon to the garage man, he hurried back to the hotel as quickly as he could, without making any outward appearance of haste.

"The visitors' book!" he ejaculated. "I ought to have thought of that. I saw it on that table in the

hall."

There was no one about in the hall when he entered, and he literally pounced upon the thick leather-bound volume with "Visitors' Book" in faded gold letters upon its cover.

"Yes, it goes back for years and years, longer than four years ago," he whispered, and he began feverishly to turn back the pages. "One—two—three—four years, now here it is: December, November, October, Sept—— A-a-h!"

A long-drawn sigh of disappointment, for a page had been torn out, and it was the one for nearly all of that

September.

He calmed down presently and set his jaw doggedly to face the situation.

"I'm not beaten yet," he scowled, "no, not by a long chalk, for now I know I'm on the right trail. Four years is not a long time and there must be someone in this town who will have heard the name of Captain Bonning and who can remember a man with a lame arm."

But no enquiries that afternoon or evening brought any such person to light, and Larose ultimately retired

to bed, a very discouraged gatherer of clues.

Next morning after breakfast, he was standing under the porch just outside the front door, along with some other visitors staying in the hotel, disconsolately regarding the rain that was descending in torrents.

It was a most dismal day and a most unpropitious one to go tramping about upon further enquiries, as he had

fully intended to do.

Presently a motor-car went splashing by and, just when passing the hotel, an arm was pushed out of the window and waved to someone. The detective noted the action without interest, deeming it was not intended for him but for some other person among the little group standing under the porch.

Despairing of the weather clearing for some hours, he went into the billiard-room and passed a not wholly unprofitable morning at snooker. His winnings came

to eighteen pence.

Just before lunch all those who had taken part in the game proceeded to adjourn to the bar for an appetizer. Passing into the hall, the detective heard a voice that was only too familiar to him, engaged in altercation with the landlady and was about to dart back, when the speaker turned round and saw him.

"Hullo, Mr. Larose," he called out cheerfully, "and this lady was certain there was no such person here." He advanced and shook hands. "But I knew I'd

recognized you. How are you?"

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. Wardle," replied Larose, covering his annoyance with an appearance of sly amusement. "So it was you who waved to me this morning?"

Gentry Wardle nodded and drew the detective aside. "I'm very sorry if I've been indiscreet," he whispered frowningly. "I ought to have thought of it and known that you wouldn't be stopping here under your own name. It was most stupid of me."

"It doesn't matter," replied Larose, who, now that the harm was done, was greatly amused at the black looks with which Mrs. Pound was regarding him. If an escaped convict had been caught sheltering in her

hotel she could not have looked more angry.

"Well, I've just come from poor old Merryweather's," went on Gentry Wardle, "and I've brought a letter for you. I told him how I had recognized you here this morning and he jumped at once at the idea of seeing you." The barrister spoke very slowly. "And however pressing your business here, Mr. Larose, you'll nevertheless have to go, for it's a dying man who wants you. He is very ill and "-a catch came into his voice-" I know I shall never see poor old Sammy again. I left London before three this morning to come and say good-bye to him and I'd stop a few days if it were not imperative that I should be in the city to-morrow." He looked sternly at the detective. "You'll go, of course?" "Yes," replied Larose, "I'll go. Does he want me

"No, I don't think until dinner-time. He said he'd got some writing to do before he sees you. But this letter will tell you."

They chatted for a few moments and then the detective

walked over with Gentry Wardle to the car.

"One last word, Mr. Larose," said the barrister, leaning out of the window for the few seconds before he let in the clutch. "Of course, as we know now we were all quite wrong about the murderer of Dane, and I admit candidly we all thought at the time, as you did, that it was one of us, although possibly no two of us were suspecting the same person. One thing, however "-and he nodded his head significantly—" I am sure there was not a single man there, except Marley, who, in his heart regretted

that Slim had rid the world of a very dirty rascal. Good-bye."

The detective seated himself in the hall and opened the

letter Gentry Wardle had given him.

DEAR MR. LAROSE [it ran],

I have only a very little while to live, for I am a sick man, and any day, any hour, may be my last. I have no idea by what strange chance you happen to be in this neighbourhood but, of the whole world, there was nobody I wanted to see as much as you. You must come here to me, to-day. I have a confession to make to you that will clear up everything about Captain Dane's death and save an innocent man. Will you dine with me to-night at seven? I am not three miles from your hotel and anyone will direct you.

Please send a message on the phone and I enjoin upon

you most solemnly to come.

Yours truly,
SAMUEL MERRYWEATHER.

The detective drew in a deep breath. "But what a reprieve for little Sonia!" he whispered. "Marley threatened, but it was Merryweather who killed. The mercy of the gods!"

CHAPTER XVII

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN"

AT six o'clock Larose set out to walk to Dr. Merryweather's. The night was cloudy, but it was not raining, and at times there was a good

moon. "And I suppose it's all right my coming here," he remarked rather dubiously to himself, "although with these highly educated people one can never be exactly certain what they will do. If he's dying, as they say, and still nurses some grievance against me, it is quite on the cards that he may not be averse to a little company upon his journey. He was going for me that time with the spear, I am quite sure, and it was only the appearance of Wardle and Rainey that saved me, for I had no thought of any danger then." He looked troubled. "Still, I shall be very careful here until I see how things are going to shape and I'm half inclined to refuse to eat or drink. Yes, I was a fool to say I'd come for a meal. Still, I can easily make out they misunderstood me over the phone and say that I've dined already." He nodded his head solemnly. "Yes, Gilbert, you'd better be very careful, my boy."

It was a beautiful walk in the moonlight, and under ordinary circumstances the detective would greatly have enjoyed it, but his thoughts were upon anything but scenery, and the whole time he was speculating as to the exact nature of the confession he was going to receive.

The house was approached by a long, narrow lane, and

it stood all by itself in a small clearing in the heart of a large wood. It was a long, rambling building of two stories and it looked very old.

"Well, it would give me the hump to live here," he remarked as he came in sight of it, "and it looks quite

the proper place where anyone should die."

An old white-haired butler answered the door and he regarded Larose intently from a pair of deep-set, rather

anxious-looking grey eyes.

"Mr. Larose, sir?" he queried in a very gentle voice and putting up one hand to his ear. "You'll excuse me, sir," he added with a wan, apologetic smile, "but I'm a little deaf except when I'm using the telephone and then I can hear quite well." His face brightened. "It was I who answered your ring this morning. Will you come this way?"

"Hum!" whispered the detective as he followed him across the hall, "quite all right so far. This old chap's

no conspirator. That's a certainty."

He ushered Larose into a long, low room with shelves of books upon three sides of it, up almost to the ceiling. Dr. Merryweather was sitting reading before the fire and he rose slowly to his feet and welcomed the detective with a bow and a grave smile. He did not, however, the latter noticed, offer to shake hands. He looked drawn and tired and his face was of an ashen-grey colour.

"So glad you've come, Mr. Larose," he said with a sort of forced gaiety in his voice. "I thought you wouldn't disappoint me. Now sit down and have a warm. I feel quite chilly to-night." He bent forward and touched the detective upon the arm. "But, just a little understanding between the said with a solution." little understanding between us and to map out our programme for the evening. Pleasure before business, for once. We're going to have an agreeable little dinner, and until that is over we'll talk about everything rather than the matter which must be uppermost in both our minds. That suits you, doesn't it?"

Larose nodded. "Quite right, Doctor," he replied,
"and I'm sure I'm very sorry you've been so ill."

"Angina pectoris," explained the doctor, smiling sadly, "strangulation of the breast, and they call such attacks as I've had the warning of the Angel of Death." He laughed softly. "But he's certainly giving me plenty of warning, for I've had four of these since I left East-bourne, and the last one "—he sighed deeply and placed his hand upon his chest—"the last one nearly finished me. It was terrible."

"But you may get better," suggested Larose. "You

may-----;

"No chance, no chance," interrupted the doctor, shaking his head, "and all the experience of my life's work tells me that the next attack will be the last." He spoke in a quiet and conversational tone. "Any emotion, any excitement, may bring it on and that is why I am postponing our little talk until after the meal." He rubbed his hands together and tried to infuse some animation into his voice. "I want to enjoy myself, if for the last time, to-night, for there'll be romance in this meal to me. A pheasant from my own woods, trout from my own stream and a bottle of burgundy that my father laid down here over sixty years ago, and all "—he threw out his hands—"all partaken of upon the very threshold of the valley of the shadow, or failing that "—he sighed whimsically—"perhaps kneeling at the very foot of the gallows."

Larose laughed to conceal the apprehension that he felt stealing over him. He perceived that the doctor was really ill, and in a highly emotional state of mind, was gradually working himself up, and he was fearful lest

a calamity should ensue.

"Oh, don't anticipate, Doctor," he said gaily. "Let's enjoy that dinner of yours first. I am hungry and it is a pheasant and not a gallows-bird that you have offered me."

"Now that's the spirit I like," exclaimed the doctor with enthusiasm. "You forget I may be a malefactor

and I'll forget you are a policeman."

The door opened noiselessly and the butler appeared with two glasses of sherry upon a silver tray.

"I'm old-fashioned," said the doctor, "and I'm offering you sherry and not a cocktail. I import this

wine myself and you'll like it."

For just the fraction of a second Larose hesitated. had come to the house brimful of suspicions about his host, and although he was now of opinion that there was nothing to justify them, yet he felt ashamed to acknowledge to himself that he had capitulated so easily.

The doctor spoke up sharply, after the manner of a man

accustomed to be instantly obeyed.

"Robert," he said, turning to the butler and raising his voice, "bring another glass of sherry, one for yourself, and you'll drink it with us here."

"I beg pardon, sir," queried the old man, looking very puzzled, "another glass of sherry—and for me to drink, here?"

"Certainly," replied the doctor, "and fetch it quickly. You opened a fresh bottle, didn't you?"

The old man nodded, and then shambled out and Dr.

Merryweather turned to the detective.

"He's seventy-three, Mr. Larose," he smiled, "and he's been in our family since he was a boy. He's been a devoted servant to me and I have a great affection for him." He looked hard at the detective and his lips curved disdainfully. "Whatever my faults may besurely you will not think me capable of poisoning an old man?"

Larose flushed in annoyance at his thought being read

so easily, then he smiled as if rather amused.

"I was remembering I was a policeman, sir," he said,

"Quite right, too," laughed the doctor, recovering his geniality immediately. "You've every reason to be suspicious of anyone you may be wanting to get hanged" -he became serious again-" but I give you my word, as a simple English gentleman, that I shall have no unkind thoughts of you at any rate until after our meal is over and then "-he shrugged his shoulders-" let each of us take care of himself."

The butler appeared with the third glass of sherry, and

the doctor smiled very kindly at him.

"I want you to remember this night, Robert," he said solemnly, "all your life." He pointed to the detective. "This gentleman is going to prove a great friend to us and you must never forget him, and always remember him in your prayers. You know his name—Larose, Gilbert Larose—and if ever you are in trouble, he's the man to go to." He bowed to Larose. "Your very good health, sir, from us both."

They drank the wine and, for the moment at any rate, the detective felt no unpleasant symptoms. Then Dr.

Merryweather turned again to his butler.

"You brought up the burgundy this afternoon as I told you to?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, and the chill should be all off by now. It's

been in my pantry since before four o'clock."

"Good!" exclaimed the doctor, and then he looked sharply at the detective. "But perhaps, Mr. Larose, you would like to be certain about that burgundy too. No, no," he went on seeing that Larose was shaking his head, "to-night there must be mutual confidence between us that everything is as it seems, and I can't have your dinner spoilt." He motioned to his butler. "Robert, take Mr. Larose down to the cellar and let him choose a bottle of wine for himself."

"But, sir," exclaimed the butler aghast, "it will be

quite cold, it will-"

"Take him down, Robert; don't argue," interrupted

the doctor sternly. "Do as I tell you, at once."

The detective, now quite hot in his annoyance, was about to protest that it was altogether unnecessary when he saw that the butler was making signs to him behind his master's back and, interpreting them to mean that the doctor was to be humoured, he rose from his chair and allowed himself to be led from the room.

"Better do as he says, sir," whispered the old man when they were out in the passage. "I don't like to

cross him in any way now he's so ill."

He produced a big torch from off a shelf in the hall and they were proceeding down a long, dimly-lit passage towards the far end of the building, when Larose noticed suddenly that his companion was acting in a very peculiar manner. He kept on glancing sideways at him with a sort of furtive look in his eyes, and he was holding his right hand deep in his trousers pocket.

"Hullo, hullo!" thought the detective at once. "Now what's this? I may have been mistaken and perhaps this old chap is not as harmless as he looks; besides, now I come to think of it, with all this talk about the dinner, I've heard no sounds of anyone else moving about in the

house."

They reached the end of the passage and he saw a steep flight of narrow stone steps, evidently leading down to the cellar. He could not see to the bottom of them for

they ended in the darkness.

"Now you wait here, sir," said the butler in an obvious state of nervousness, "and I'll go down and get the door open and show a light. The stairs are rather slippery at the bottom." And taking it for granted, he stepped forward to go down.

But the detective, with a lightning movement, dragged him back. "No, no, you don't," he said sharply. "None of that for me. Come on, you've got a gun in your pocket. Let's have it." And with a grip of steel,

he began to twist the butler's arm.

The old man almost choked in his consternation. "No, no," he exclaimed in very frightened tones. "You're hurting me, sir, you're hurting me. I've got nothing to shoot with in my pocket."

"Well, give it up," snarled the detective, and immediately the butler's nerveless fingers unclasped upon

a very big key.

"Only the key of the cellar, sir," he quavered. "We

have to keep it locked."

It was now Larose's turn to experience an unpleasant feeling in the throat. He had snatched the torch from the butler and, flashing it upon the old man's

face, saw that the latter was almost upon the verge of tears.

"Well, what the devil did you keep squinting at me out of the corner of your eyes for?" he asked angrily.

"It looked as if you were up to no good."

"I didn't want you to know, sir," exclaimed the old man plaintively, "that we had to keep the cellar door locked. You see, it's on account of my wife, sir. She's a good woman, and a splendid cook, as you'll see, sir, but she has a little failing and we have to keep her away from the drink. It's very awkward sometimes and—"

"All right, all right," said Larose, and he put as much gentleness into his voice as he could. "I'm so sorry,

and it was awfully stupid of me. Now, look here."

He took out his wallet and extracting a pound note, held it out to the butler. "Put that in your pocket," he said, "and just forget I was such a fool. Don't say anything to your master, of course."

But the old man gently pushed the note aside. "No, thank you, sir, but I won't take it. It was all my fault for

acting so stupidly and I'm very sorry about it."

"Come on, take it," said Larose smilingly. "Never

refuse money, my friend."

The butler straightened himself up. "But I don't need it, thank you, sir," he replied with dignity. "I have plenty of money saved. I've been here nearly sixty years and the master have been very generous to me."

The detective felt most uncomfortable and for the

moment could think of nothing more to say.

"Well, we'll go down into the cellar, sir," said the

butler quickly, "if you'll hand me back my torch."

"I don't want to," replied Larose sharply. "There's no need to and we'll drink the wine you've brought up."

"But the master, sir," said the butler, "it'll worry him if we haven't done as he told us." His old voice trembled. "I do all I can to humour him now."

"All right," nodded Larose, very annoyed with everything, "you lead the way."

They went down into the cellar and the butler pointed

round to many hundreds of bottles of wine.

"We have some beautiful wines here, sir," he explained with great pride, "and his Majesty the King, even, hasn't got better. There's port here, seventy years old, and claret from the most renowned vineyards in France, and that burgundy you're going to drink—well I carried it down to those bins when I was a small boy, and the master could only toddle. Look at the cobwebs on the bottles, sir. They haven't been touched for over sixty years." He chuckled. "Fancy, when those bottles were last handled I was sucking peppermint balls and was years off my first sweetheart, and now "—his face was all wrinkled up in smiles—"I've got nine grand-children, sir, and the oldest little minx among them powders her face and has got a boy friend." He cracked his fingers together in great amusement. "And all the time those bottles have been lying there undisturbed."

The detective was most interested in all he saw, and after a few minutes rather reluctantly returned upstairs. He had refused emphatically to pick out another bottle

of wine.

Dinner was served in a few minutes and, from the moment they sat down, Larose found his host a very different man to the quiet and retiring doctor he had met at Southdown Court, for now the latter was for ever talking the whole time. It was exactly as if he would not allow himself to be alone with his own thoughts for one single moment and this unnatural animation and forced gaiety struck a most sad note in Larose's heart.

Whatever might be Dr. Merryweather's faults, he was suffering, both physically and mentally now, and no bright sallies of wit nor keen analysis of the current affairs of the world could smooth from his face those lines of pain, or mask from his wearied eyes the apprehension of more agony to come. He was most morbid, too, in the subjects he chose for conversation and continually harping upon the disabilities of age.

"But you know," he said presently, drinking his wine

quickly, and without tasting it, "life itself is the great mystery of life." He spread out his hands. "We come, we go, and in our folly and dreaming only are we certain of what lies beyond." He shook his head sadly. "It is terrible, growing old, Mr. Larose, for the glory of life is youth, although youth itself never learns it. It is only as we grow old the knowledge comes to us that in our young days we had been gulping down the rare wine of life when instead we should have been sipping it—drop by drop."

"But you don't fear death, sir?" suggested Larose.

"No, no, not in the least," he replied instantly, making a grimace, "but I don't at all like dying, and "—he lifted up his hand to emphasize his point—"this is a funny thing. Here am I, expecting a most unpleasant form of death coming perhaps at a most inopportune moment, and with the means in my possession of making it quite a pleasant one and exactly at my own time, too "—he shrugged his shoulders—" I nevertheless choose to allow Nature to take her own course and carry out things in her own uncaring, callous way."

"Well, suicide's a messy business," remarked Larose.

"It always-

"Not at all, not at all," smiled the doctor. "I have six ounces of chloroform in my desk at the moment-I have been cleaning some insulating wires in the radioand in five minutes, with a quarter of them, I could pass into eternity in a most pleasant and respectable manner." He sighed deeply. "But I won't do it because I don't want anyone to say afterwards that Sam Merryweather was a quitter." He laughed slyly. "Pride, Mr. Larose, just pride, the pride of a man who with all his felonious misdeeds—of which you are going to hear shortly—tried to live up to the standard of an English gentleman."
He rose briskly to his feet. "But come back to the

library, will you, for it's time we had our talk."

He touched the bell and passing through the hall, they

met the butler coming from the kitchen.

"Give your wife a glass of port, Robert," he said, "and have one yourself, of course."

Entering the library he closed the door behind the detective, and motioned him to a seat in front of the desk.

"You sit there," he said, "and then we shall be right opposite to one another and able to watch each other's faces." He smiled gravely. "That is most important."

They sat down and the detective's heart began to beat unpleasantly. He had been in many queer situations before, but this was certainly one of the queerest. It was exactly as if the doctor were setting the stage for some gruesome tragedy.

A few moments of silence followed and then the

doctor spoke.

"Prepare yourself for a great shock, Mr. Larose," he said solemnly, "and remember to occasion me as little emotion as possible, for I want to tell you everything right to the very end. I have warned you—well, to put it mildly—that excitement is bad for me." He bowed. "I know quite well what your opinion of me will be in a few minutes, but I would remind you that nothing will be gained by your expressing it."

"Good!" said the detective, and then he added with

"Good!" said the detective, and then he added with a grim smile: "But what you are going to tell me may not after all be such a surprise packet as you think. I've not been all this time on my investigations for

nothing I"

Dr. Merryweather drew in a deep breath and then

sighed heavily.

"Mr. Larose," he said, speaking very slowly and with an effort, "I killed Captain Dane and I"—he paused for

a long moment—" I also shot you."

It might almost have been that Larose had not heard him, for not a muscle of the detective's face moved, and he sat on as if carved in stone. Only his eyes betrayed any sign of emotion, and they were glaring fiercely at the speaker.

"Yes," went on Dr. Merryweather, his voice shaking a little, but speaking more easily now, "I killed Captain Dane that night in the billiard-room and I made two

attempts to kill you and would have made two other ones had circumstances been more propitious."

Still Larose made no comment, and a defiant note crept

into the doctor's voice.

"I was going to kill you that afternoon with the spear in the billiard-room, when we were interrupted, and when I offered you the loan of a mackintosh that rainy evening, I was ready to pistol you directly you went into the grounds." His eyes gloated exultingly. "Then when I had managed to shoot you, but unhappily for my plans, not fatally, I crept into your room afterwards in the dead of night, and was in the act of giving you a lethal dose of morphia, when you cried out, and I dropped my syringe and broke it and so could not make another attempt." He almost barked out his next words. "Do you believe me or do you not?"

At last the detective showed that he had heard, and nodded in acquiescence. The furious resentment he was feeling was under perfect control. "But you caused me a lot of suffering, Doctor," he said reproachfully; "have

you never thought of that?"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the doctor quickly, with all the triumph in his face now changed to remorse, "and it has been, night and day, in my thoughts. I had no qualms whatever in giving you a painless death, but to occasion you the suffering that I did "—his voice shook—" well, I assure you it has been a great grief to me, for as a medical man, I know the dreadful time you must have been through."

"But why did you do it, Doctor," asked Larose, looking very puzzled, "when you knew that unless you made a confession such as you have done now, there was

not a shred of evidence against you?"

"But you had found that letter of Sir James Marley's,

had you not?" asked the doctor very sternly.

"I have it," replied the detective quietly, evading a direct answer. "I found it where you had hidden it along with the banknotes in the back of that settee."

"Exactly," snapped the doctor, "and that was your

undoing. The letter, on the face of it, was a most damning piece of evidence against Sir James, and although he would have been cleared at once by a frank avowal on my part, still, it would have brought a dreadful scandal upon my god-daughter, and I was not willing that that should happen." He said deeply: "She is expecting to become a mother."

"And if you had killed me," asked Larose coldly, how would it have benefited anyone? The letter

would have still been in existence."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor quickly, "but I reckoned upon getting that letter before anyone else had seen it. I knew it was your habit to work alone, and was sure you would confide in no one until you had unearthed the motive that lay behind the threat." He smiled sarcastically. "You are a vain man, Mr. Larose, and you like yourself to play all the good cards."

"Thank you," replied the detective meekly. His eyes flashed. "But you didn't get that letter, anyhow." "No," admitted the doctor, "but it wasn't for want

"No," admitted the doctor, "but it wasn't for want of trying. I searched your clothes directly they were taken from you after you had been shot, and I went over everything in your room." He shrugged his shoulders. "Then I was of opinion that you had hidden the letter somewhere in the Court so effectually that it would never come to light if you were dead." He looked rather shamefaced. "So I did my best to make you dead."

A short silence followed and then Larose said sternly:

"And so, Dr. Merryweather, after having killed one man—just to save Lady Marley from some unpleasantness—you would have committed another dreadful crime"—his lips curved contemptuously—"and only a few minutes ago you referred to yourself as an English gentleman."

The doctor winced. "I don't attempt to justify it," he replied quickly. "It was a dreadful thing to do and I cannot condemn myself too strongly but"—and he shook his head very slowly—"I'm afraid, Mr. Larose, that with all my regrets, I should do it again, for "—his

voice was almost a whisper now—"I have come to love Sonia Marley with the foolish, hopeless passion of a man grown old."

"And why then did you murder Captain Dane?"

asked the detective sharply and in cold professional tones. "I didn't murder him!" exclaimed the doctor instantly. "I killed him accidentally, and purely in selfdefence. I struck him first, I admit, but it was only with my hand and then when he attacked me, I"-he shook his head wearily—" but I'll tell you the whole story and then we shall not have to go over things twice."

He leant back in his chair and regarded the detective

intently.

"Of course, Mr. Larose," he began, "after you arrived at the Court, although we all of us had tried to hinder you in your enquiries as much as possible, we soon realized that you had got a pretty good idea as to our joint opinions of Captain Dane. In the short space of three days, all the men except Sir James Marley had come to dislike him most intensely. Even his old friend Colonel Mead had turned against him because of his insolent familiarity with the ladies, and the matter was aggravated in our opinions because of the ladies themselves, with the exception of Lady Marley, not discouraging him to the extent we should have liked. You had heard that of course, hadn't you?"

The detective nodded. "I heard that he had been

more popular than anyone."

Dr. Merryweather smiled grimly. "He was of the type of man to be popular, Mr. Larose, with the ladies. He was very good-looking, and with such fascinating manners that I can understand any woman encouraging him quite innocently but with no idea of how far the man was prepared to press his attentions." He paused a moment and then added significantly: "With the exception of Lady Marley."

"What was her attitude towards him, then?" asked

Larose.

"She was his hostess," replied Dr. Merryweather quickly, "and nothing more. She was trying all the time to keep him at a distance and not let her husband have any idea how his old friend was annoying her—the friend who had been his superior officer and who had

once saved his life."

The doctor sighed. "And that was the position up to the night of the disaster and then things began to happen rapidly." He spoke very quickly. "Soon after eleven I was passing one of the alcoves in the corridor leading to the ballroom and I heard the voice of Lady Marley distinctly. She said: 'And for the last time, Captain Dane, if you don't leave me alone I shall tell my husband!' I drew back instantly—horrified—and then Lady Marley came running out with Dane unsuccessfully

trying to catch hold of her."

Dr. Merryweather went on. "I say I was horrified, for not only was I disgusted with the man's conduct but I felt a certain responsibility for his being there and able to annoy Lady Marley." He held up one long forefinger to the detective. "You see, Mr. Larose, in the course of my medical work, I had introduced to the profession a special form of treatment for the cure of certain nervous diseases. Briefly, it was the injection of a particular snake venom, and Captain Dane was at one time afflicted with one of these very diseases, and when in a perfectly hopeless condition, had been cured by that treatment. But for me he would have been dead long ago."

The doctor paused for quite a long time here. He folded his arms tightly across the chest and his face was all puckered up in distress. "Oh, but I don't feel well!" he exclaimed. "I'm sure I'm going to have another attack." He drew in a deep breath and then smiled humorously. "But I can't stop now. I want to tell you all and then I don't mind how soon I cheat the

gallows."

He went on, speaking very quickly: "Well, I made up my mind to give Captain Dane a sharp warning the next day. I would have done it that night but he had 40

been seized with one of his sudden malarial attacks and I thought I'd wait until the morning. We all went up to our rooms just after midnight, leaving him alone in the billiard-room before the fire. I, however, could not sleep. My nerves were all on edge and I lay awake staring into the darkness. Dane's room, as you remember, was next to mine, and I would have sworn I heard him go in soon after I was in bed. Mr. and Mrs. Culloden were sleeping in the room on the other side of me and someone in there, I could hear, was very restless. I could not drop off to sleep and realizing at last that it was hopeless, I thought I would go down and dope myself with a stiff glass of whisky. It was then exactly a quarter to two."

Dr. Merryweather took another rest and then faced the

detective defiantly.

"I got out of bed and just as I was—I don't feel the cold—walked into the corridor, and the first thing I noticed was that the door of Dane's room was ajar. I thought it strange and put my head inside. The blinds were up, the room was flooded with moonlight and I saw the bed was empty and had not been slept in. I was just turning away when I noticed there was a paper pinned to the frame of the swinging mirror above the dressingtable. It was askew and that was perhaps why it caught my eye. I stepped over to it and saw it was written upon in Marley's handwriting. Instantly a feeling of uneasiness filled me and I switched on the light to read what was written upon it. 'Great God!' I thought, 'and he's fallen asleep in the billiard-room and never received it.'

"I snatched down the paper and ran downstairs. I made no sound in my bare feet. I found the billiard-room door open, the light still on and Dane asleep where we had left him in the arm-chair. I woke him at once. He was too dazed to read but I told him what was in the

letter and said he must go up and pack at once."

The doctor paused a moment and Larose asked

sharply: "Was the fire still burning?"

"No," replied Dr. Merryweather hurriedly. "I

didn't notice it then, but I'll come to that presently. Well, I rated Dane soundly and called him names that should have made him wince but he only jeered at me and then he said mockingly "—the doctor could hardly get his breath now—"he said Lady Marley had been his mistress, and that finished it, for I struck him in the face. Yes, I struck him, and he jumped to his feet spluttering with rage. Then, before I could grasp what he was going to do, he rushed to the wall and got some weapon to attack me with—he couldn't fight me with his fists with that maimed arm—and then "-the doctor looked almost upon the verge of collapse—"but you'll find everything in the statement I have written for you here." And he pointed to a sealed envelope upon the desk.

A long silence followed and Dr. Merryweather, with his eyes closed, lay back exhausted in his chair. Larose had picked up the envelope indicated and put it in his pocket. He looked thoughtfully into the fire. It was

Dr. Merryweather again who spoke next.

"But I must go on," he said shakily, "for there are things I can tell you so much better than writing them."

He pulled himself together and sat up straighter.

"About that blow I gave him," he went on, "it wasn't a hard one and I had no idea for quite three minutes or so that I had killed him. It came out later at the inquest that his temporal bone was abnormally thin there, and what would have been only a few minutes' unconsciousness for another man meant death for him." He looked hard at the detective. "But I expect you heard that?"

Larose nodded. "Inspector Roberts mentioned it."

"Well," went on the doctor again, "when Dane was dead and the immediate shock to me had in some measure passed off, my first thoughts were not only to save myself , but to prevent suspicion falling upon any of the other guests staying in the house. I thought-"

"That was nice for the servants," commented Larose

dryly, "wasn't it?"

"There was only the butler whom the police could have suspected of having done it," replied the doctor sharply, "and because I intended myself to get possession of the two thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds in banknotes there would not be a shade of evidence against him, and besides—his twenty years of service with the Marleys would, I knew, suggest his innocence upon the very face of it."

"You found the notes upon the body?" asked Larose.

"No, I didn't, but I took Dane's keys out of his pocket and soon found them at the bottom of his portmanteau. I returned the keys to the pocket and then was considering how I could get rid of the letter and the packet of banknotes—I was holding both of them in my hand, for I couldn't burn them in the fire because it was dead—when to my terror I heard someone coming down the passage leading to the billiard-room. I had only a few seconds to think and, in frenzied haste, I thrust them down into the back of the settee nearest the door and then sprang behind the door waiting for what would happen next."

Larose interrupted with a question. He saw that the doctor's face had gone a dreadful colour and he wanted to give him time to recover. He spoke very slowly. "And was the light still burning over the mantel-

"And was the light still burning over the mantel-shelf?" he asked. "And, except for that, the room would have been in complete darkness because of the curtains—

no moonlight, I mean?"

The doctor gulped down a lump in his throat. "Yes, it would have been in complete darkness except for that light," he replied weakly, "and as it was, the half of the room near the door was in the shadows." He went on: "Well, to my amazement, I saw it was Mrs. Culloden who came through the doorway. She was walking very slowly, as if cautiously feeling her way. She walked about half a dozen paces into the room, and then I heard a deep sigh and she stood quite still. She had her back towards me and I slipped round the door and out into the passage like a ghost. I fled along the passage and up the stairs, expecting every moment to hear a shriek but I gained my room in perfect silence and gently pushed to

the door. I looked at my watch. It was three minutes to two and so everything happened in about twelve minutes."

"One moment," interrupted Larose. "You say you could not burn the letter there because the fire was dead. How do you reconcile that with the statement you, Gentry Wardle and Mr. Culloden made to Inspector Roberts that you had left the captain sitting before a bright fire when you went up to bed about twelve-fifteen? Remember twelve-fifteen to one-forty-five is only an hour and a half and surely a bright fire could not go absolutely dead in that time?"

"But it had," retorted the doctor, "and you remember, please, the last we saw of Captain Dane was his stirring it up to make a good blaze. He got the last and best out of it."

"But why didn't you take the notes and letter away

with you?" asked Larose.

"I didn't want to be caught with them in my hands," replied the doctor instantly, "and that was the only way in which I could have gone off with them, for I was in my pyjamas, as I have told you. The little jacket pocket in the pyjamas would not have hidden a bulky object like they made." His voice became querulous. "I didn't know who was coming into the room and look in what a dreadful light I should have appeared, with them in my hand! I had just caused Captain Dane's death and presumably then-for he had told everyone at dinner that he was carrying them upon him—callously picked his pocket to get the notes."

"But you could have taken the letter and hidden the

notes," persisted Larose.

"Oh, I hadn't time to think of that," replied the doctor with irritation. "I was holding the letter and the notes squeezed together in one hand, and I thrust them anywhere to get rid of them for the moment."

"Go on," said Larose, "it sounds quite natural." "Of course it was natural," growled the doctor. "I was in a most terrible predicament and had to think of everything in the instant." He went on speaking very quietly. "Well, I have nearly finished. I was back in my room, as I say, before two, and for more than an hour I knelt crouching by my door, waiting for something to happen. But everything continued perfectly quiet, and I was just upon the point of creeping downstairs again to see where Mrs. Culloden was, and if I could get back into the billiard-room, when I heard a thud, as of someone springing hurriedly out of bed on to the floor, in the room occupied by the Cullodens. I opened my door ever so little, and two seconds later, saw Mr. Culloden himself go running by. He had found out that his wife was missing, of course, and had gone to look for her."

The agonized expression came again upon his face, and he stopped speaking and pressed his hand against his chest. Larose as before, looked away into the fire.

More than a minute passed before the doctor resumed and then he had got himself in hand again, indeed he was

"Well, Mr. Larose," he said, "I have brought down my story to three o'clock that morning and for the next three and a half hours there is very little to tell. Mr. Culloden came running back past my door almost at once to go down the stairs again in a couple of minutes with some eiderdowns over his shoulder. I followed him instantly as far as the top of the stairs, and looking down through the banisters, saw him tuck up his wife who was asleep in the arm-chair. Then I realized everything.

Mrs. Culloden was a sleep-walker."

He laughed ironically. "Oh, if I had only known it I could have passed her with the letter and those notes and she would have noticed nothing!" He made a gesture of resignation. "But it was too late then and I never got another chance. Her husband picked up a book off the table and sat reading beside her, waiting for her to wake, but she didn't wake until past six o'clock, and by that time the servants were stirring and I dared not risk going down. A housemaid appeared in the hall and began tidying up almost before Culloden, after

leading his wife upstairs, had closed their bedroom door.

It was a wonder the girl didn't see them."

He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and, after raising it to wipe his forehead, laid it down in front of

him upon the desk.

"Now, Mr. Larose," he said and, to the detective, it seemed there was more resolution in his voice than there had been at any time during the evening, "now do you believe me or do you not?"

Larose did not reply for a moment and then he nodded

solemnly.

"Yes, Dr. Merryweather," he replied, "I do believe you. You have a very warped idea of what is right and wrong, and all my life, probably, I shall suffer from the after-effects of that wound you gave me. Still "—he nodded again—"I believe you have been speaking the truth to-night."

"And why do you believe me?" asked the doctor, leaning forward over the desk and with the tense attitude

of one to whom the reply was of vital import.

"Because," replied Larose, "I can verify your story in several ways. First, I noticed that pin-hole in Sir James Marley's letter and could not account for it; secondly, no pistol nor any remains of a pistol was found upon Slim nor among the debris of the car that was burnt, and thirdly, I smelt you that night when you were pricking me with the hypodermic syringe—the strong smell of a jacket impregnated with cigar smoke." He sighed. "I remembered it all the next morning, but I thought it was a dream then. Oh, and another thing—the nurses were arguing next day about some broken pieces of glass upon the floor." He nodded again but quite carelessly this time. "Yes, Doctor Merryweather, I believe you."

The tension on the doctor's face relaxed, he drew in a deep breath and he smiled as if in great relief.

"Then I'll make a little present to you, sir," he said, and sweeping aside the handkerchief upon his desk, he picked up something that he had been grasping underneath and held it out to the detective. "The pistol that

I shot you with." His voice quavered, and it almost seemed as if he were restraining himself with difficulty from tears. "I was going to give you only one bullet from it if you hadn't believed me, and"—he sighed deeply-" I was going to kill you this time."

The forehead of the detective broke into little beads of sweat but he took the pistol with a hand that did not

shake and when he spoke it was quite calmly.

"Thank you, Doctor," he said, "it will be quite an interesting souvenir." He eyed him very sternly. "So you would have murdered a man who had done you no injury and who was simply carrying out his duty "—his voice was hard and bitter—" with no deeper motive for your crime than that you would have saved a woman from the tongue of scandal?" Curiosity now took the place of anger. "But why did you contemplate doing it when you knew this confession here would have completely absolved Sir James from the charge of murder?"

Dr. Merryweather stirred uneasily in his chair. "Oh, I don't know," he replied wearily, "but I wanted to make things absolutely certain." He spoke very wistfully. "Now don't rub it in, please, Mr. Larose. I don't attempt to justify myself," and then he added quickly: "You won't have to use that letter now, will you?"

The detective regarded him with a puzzled frown. "I don't suppose so," he said slowly. "It doesn't

supplement your confession in any way."

The doctor breathed a sigh of relief. "And what are you going to do with me, now," he asked, "after all I've told you?" He smiled wanly. "If you are going to apply for a warrant, you'll have to be quick, for all the time we have been talking I have been feeling the pains that are always a preliminary to my attacks."

"I don't know," replied Larose slowly. "I shall have to think what I must do." He regarded the ashen face and pain-haunted eyes before him and a great pity surged into his heart. "At any rate, I'll give you three days, Doctor," he said, "and then I'll let you know what

I'm going to do." He nodded his head significantly. "I won't take that bottle of chloroform from you."

"Thank you," said Dr. Merryweather simply.
"Thank you. I understand." He puckered up his face as if he were in pain. "And now I think I'll get Robert to help me into bed. Good-bye, Mr. Larose, and I'm

obliged to you for coming up."

"Not at all," replied Larose carefully. "Good-bye." And then a sudden impulse seized him and he walked up to the doctor and held out his hand. "I bear you no ill-will, sir, for after all, it was one of the risks I am paid to face." He smiled. "But you didn't hold all the best cards, did you?"

"No," replied the doctor, "I hadn't much of a hand." For the moment he appeared to forget his pains and he laughed lightly. "But thanks to you, I've still one good one left to play"—he paused a moment—" the ace of

spades."

Directly he was back in The Bridge Hotel and alone in his room, the detective opened the envelope Dr. Merryweather had given him and proceeded to read through the confession. Great care had evidently been taken in its preparation for it was beautifully written and with no correction nor erasures in all of its four pages of foolscap paper. It was dated only that day and was witnessed by Robert and Mary Prince.

He had read more than half-way through it, when suddenly he gave a startled exclamation and opened his

mouth, then he turned his eyes away and sighed.

He sat in a deep reverie for a long time and then he bowed his head and covered his face over with his hands.

The next morning the detective was summoned to the telephone before he was completely dressed. It was Dr. Merryweather's butler who spoke and his voice was choked with grief.

"The-master-died-sir," he said, "just-beforetwo o'clock—this morning. He left a message for you, that he hoped you would stay for his funeral for then he would know you had forgiven him." The detective could almost hear the old man's tears falling. "I can't understand what he meant, sir, for the master had never harmed anyone. He was the kindest man in all the world."

Dr. Merryweather was buried three days later and Larose stayed on for the funeral. There were no flowers and by request also, no mourners save the detective, the family lawyer and the two old servants.

Sonia's father conducted the burial service and Samuel Egerton Merryweather was consigned to the grave in the

sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

Larose was not introduced to the clergyman, but after the service he lunched with the lawyer in the doctor's house where Robert, between his tears, had decanted a bottle of very old sherry with becoming ceremony. During the course of the meal the lawyer informed Larose that Dr. Merryweather had left him £5,000.

The detective took train for London the same

afternoon.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE JUDGMENT OF LAROSE

afternoon, Gilbert Larose walked thoughtfully up the drive of Southdown Court and touched lightly upon the bell-push of the front door.

The smart parlourmaid, Betty Yates, answered the door promptly and smiled engagingly when she saw

who the caller was.

"You're quite a stranger, Mr. Larose," she said, and

she held the door open wide.

"Is Sir James in?" asked the detective in a very subdued tone of voice and making no movement to enter.

"No, he's not, sir," replied the girl, "but I don't think he'll be very long. He's only gone into the town."

Larose hesitated. "Well, perhaps—" he began.
"But her ladyship is in," interrupted the girl, still smiling, "and I'm sure she'll be pleased to see you."

"Oh, but I only just want to speak to Sir James," exclaimed the detective slowly; he hesitated again, "and so I think I'll—"

"I think you'll come in, Mr. Larose," interrupted a silvery voice from the back of the hall. "Of course you will;" and Lady Marley appeared behind the parlourmaid.

Larose at once took off his hat and advanced into the hall. Lady Marley held out her hand and he took it with a smile which was, however, rather a grave one. She led the way into her sitting-room and when they had

seated themselves at once commenced to talk very quickly as if for some reason she was rather nervous.

"And how are you?" she said. "I do hope you are keeping well. Yes, you look well, but rather tired. You are back in Eastbourne very soon. We didn't expect to have the pleasure of seeing you so quickly again. Are you stopping long? You'll stay to dinner now, won't you?"

The detective regarded her thoughtfully. Her face had grown a little thinner since he had last seen her and she looked flushed and nervous. "Yes," he thought

sadly, "what a lovely girl she is."

"I am very well, thank you," he replied. "No, I'm afraid I can't stay to dinner. I'm only down here for a few hours and must get back to London to-night."

"How sad about Dr. Merryweather," she went on.

"It was such a dreadful ending and he must have suffered a lot of pain." She looked away into the fire. "I have known him all my life and his was such a beautiful character. He was always so unselfish and kind."

She looked intently at the detective and then all at once her nervousness seemed to disappear. She steadied her

voice and a note, almost of defiance, crept into it.

"We heard you had been staying at Ivybridge," she went on, "and Dr. Merryweather wrote to us the day before he died that you were going there to dinner."

"Yes," replied Larose uneasily, and devoutly hoping that her next question would not be to ask why he had gone there, "I spent the evening with him and it was

very tragic."

"And you stayed for the funeral," she said. "Robert wrote to us that the dear old doctor had specially asked you to." Her face softened tenderly. "It was very kind of you, although"—her eyes flashed—"it was a great honour, for he had forbidden all of his friends to come. He knew that he was going to die and he told everyone that he would have no mourners except Robert. She frowned as if rather puzzled. "And then he asked you!"

"Yes," nodded Larose, and he hastened to turn the conversation into a different channel. "His grave is close to those of your people."

Lady Marley was still frowning as she asked quickly: "You knew, of course, it was my father who buried

him?"

Larose nodded. "Yes, and he's like you."

A few moments of silence followed and the detective stirred uneasily in his chair for, with a pang, he had realized suddenly that they were now fencing together and he prayed devoutly that the buttons would not come off the foils.

Lady Marley was no longer to him the sweet and gentle woman who had given unstintingly of her best to ensure that he should have every chance of being restored to health again; she was no longer the ministering angel who had sat so often at his bedside; she was-but she broke through his reverie sharply and after the manner of an antagonist who was making ready to strike a shrewd blow.

"And poor Dr. Merryweather," she began, with her big eyes fastened upon him fearlessly, "did it strike you at all that last night when you were with him—that he was subject to hallucinations?"

Larose was the cool, calculating detective at once. "Not at all," he replied emphatically. "He was most collected and level-headed during the whole of the

evening."

"But his illness," persisted Lady Marley, "must have had some effect upon his brain. The dreadful suffering he had already gone through and knowing it would continue until the end, must have unnerved him to some extent."

"Well, he didn't show it," replied Larose. "He was very brave all the time I was with him and quite rational

in everything he said."

Lady Marley was apparently about to make some other remark when suddenly they heard the sound of voices in the hall and a few moments later the door opened and Sir James Marley came into the room.

"Very pleased to see you, Mr. Larose," he said cordially as they shook hands. "I hope you are feeling all right again."

"Yes, thank you, I'm quite well," replied Larose.

"No return of the pain?" asked the baronet. "You feel you are getting stronger?"

"Yes, I'm much stronger," replied Larose. "I've

never looked back,"

"That's right," said Sir James. He shook his head reprovingly. "But you should not have returned that little piece of paper I sent you." He nodded in the direction of his wife. "We were both disappointed, for we would have greatly liked you to have bought something to remember us by "—he smiled—" besides those scars that you will always carry."

Larose reddened uncomfortably. The cheque he had returned was the last thing he wanted to be reminded of

just then. He spoke very quietly.

"I want to have a few minutes' talk with you, please, Sir James, if I may," and he remained standing, making no attempt to sit down as the baronet had already done.

"Certainly," smiled Sir James, "and I'm entirely at your disposal for as long as you like." He pointed to the chair from which the detective had risen. "Sit down and make yourself comfortable."

"But I want to speak to you alone, please," said the

detective, "if you don't mind."

A moment's silence followed and the baronet frowned but it was Lady Marley who spoke next.

"Alone!" she exclaimed sharply. "What for, Mr.

Larose?"

The detective spoke very gently. "I'd like it to be alone with your husband," he replied, "if you wouldn't mind." He put all the kindness he could into his voice. "I think it would be better."

Lady Marley's eyes flashed angrily. "But you're not going to talk to him about the death of Captain Dane, are you?" she asked. "You don't want to bring that up again, do you?"

"I don't want to, but I have to, Lady Marley," replied the detective reluctantly. "There are some points I must clear up."

"But, Mr. Larose, I am sure—" she began.

"Please, please, Sonia," interrupted her husband, "let me talk to Mr. Larose." He turned to the detective and smiled, but the latter noticed that his fine, handsome face had become a little pale. "Now, sir," he went on, "let us be quite frank and open with one another. You've come, of course, about the statement that Dr. Merryweather made to you," and when Larose nodded, he added: "Well, we thought you would and indeed, we expected you." He waved his hand towards a chair. "Now sit down and we'll talk here."

"But I'd rather talk to you alone," persisted the

detective. "It would be much better."

"We'll talk here, please," said the baronet decisively, "for my wife knows everything, and any mystery about our conversation would only worry her and cause her distress."

Larose sighed and sat down. He had done his best and there was no help for it, and anything that would follow would not be his fault, he thought.

Sir James moved over and sat down near his wife. He smiled tenderly at her and putting one of his hands over

hers, let it rest there, and turned to the detective.

"I was hoping, Mr. Larose," he said, "that this sad affair was finished with and, myself, I can see nothing to be gained by reopening it. Dr. Merryweather wrote to us, telling us exactly what, I expect, he told you—that he had had a quarrel with Captain Dane and they had come to blows, and then in defending himself from an attack, he had been unfortunate enough to strike that fatal blow." He looked intently at the detective. "That is what he told you, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Larose, "he told me that," and consciously or unconsciously the detective laid stress

upon the "told."

"And you believed him?" asked Sir James sharply.

"I did at first," replied the detective, "but when, back in my hotel that night, I read the confession that he had written out for me, I knew he had not been speaking the truth."

Quite a long silence followed, with Lady Marley evidently deep in thought, looking out of the window.

Presently the baronet nodded his head solemnly. "And I agree with you," he said. "He did not do it, for on the face of it he was not the man to get mixed up in a quarrel with anyone. He was much too eventempered and had far too great a control over himself for that. The trouble must have got upon his mind and he imagined everything." He regarded the detective very solemnly. "It is most distressing for, as you know, the doctor was a great friend of ours and would have done anything for us."

Larose heaved a great sigh and prepared to face an

unpleasant duty.

"Yes, even to the extent of perjuring himself," he exclaimed sharply; he looked with great sternness at the baronet, "for it was you, sir, who killed Captain Dane!"

Sir James Marley drew in a deep breath, his eyes stared, and his face grew ghastly white. Then, turning suddenly to his wife, who had broken into passionate sobs, he put his arm round her and drew her tenderly to his side.

"It's all right, darling!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Larose is making a great mistake and he has nothing to support

his statement."

"I am grievously sorry, Sir James," retorted Larose quickly, "and it is one of the unhappiest moments of my

life. I hate to accuse you but I have to do it."

"Never mind the accusation, Mr. Larose," replied Sir James grimly, and with the colour now beginning to come back into his face. "It is the proof that will be wanted."

"And I have it, sir," replied the detective sadly. There was no triumph in his voice. "The letter you

wrote to Captain Dane is in my possession."

The baronet's face fell, and he looked very startled,

but he recovered himself quickly.

"Ah, that letter!" he exclaimed frowningly; "so, Dane hadn't burnt it." He nodded with spirit. "Well, I don't deny it. Captain Dane had annoyed me and I requested him to leave the Court. I threatened, I admit, but you have no proof that I carried out my threat."
His voice rose in scorn. "Why, man, that confession Dr. Merryweather has sent me will acquit me every time. I should never go up for trial even, for with that letter before them, no grand jury would return a true bill."
"You are wrong, sir," said Larose sadly, "for Dr.

Merryweather made one very great mistake in this confession that he made and this mistake proves most conclusively that he was not the man who killed Captain

Dane in self-defence."

"Oh!" exclaimed the baronet, as if he had not heard

correctly, "please explain."

"Dr. Merryweather," replied Larose solemnly, writes that Captain Dane attacked him with a spear, whereas "—he spoke very slowly—" the man who killed the captain was defending himself against that long Malay knife that is hanging over the settee above the place where the captain was struck down."

The baronet had steeled his face to perfect calm and if all the happiness of his life were falling about him, his expression did not betray it. He was the soldier who had led his men over the trenches, he was the officer and the gentleman who had been trained not to show fear.

"Yes," went on the detective, "in the billiard-room there is a Malay knife with a spot of blood upon its hilt and with broken edges to its blade. Captain Dane attacked you with that knife, and in self-defence you struck him down, for there is the blacklead from the poker upon the guard of the knife." His voice was almost broken in its unhappiness. "Oh, why didn't you admit in the beginning. It would have been one scandal then not two, as must ensue now."

The face of the baronet was deathly calm and there

was no stress nor storm of emotion upon it. "I had more than myself to think of," he replied sadly, "thenas now." He shrugged his shoulders and added laconically: "You win, sir, it is your game."

"It is no triumph for me," said the detective gloomily,

Sir James turned on him in a flash. "No triumph for you!" he mocked. "You, the man who never-He bowed apologetically. "I beg your pardon, sir. It was a most unworthy taunt. You had your duty to do and you have done it splendidly and I congratulate you."

And then suddenly a sob burst from his wife and instantly he bent down over her but she thrust him back

and rose trembling to her feet.

"And do you know, Mr. Larose," she cried, choking back her tears, "what kind of man my husband killed and why he threatened him? Oh! oh! I forgot"her eyes blazed—"and that's why you went down to Ivybridge." She almost spat out the next words: "You spy!"

The detective moistened his dry lips with his tongue. He did not mind the epithet which she had thrown at him, but remembering the event the future should have been holding for her, it was dreadful for him to perceive

the emotional stress which she was now in.

She went on furiously: "Yes, you spy, and that's what we gave you of our best for, when you were sick! You went down to the home of my girlhood to try and rake up some mud against me and you think I didn't hear of it. But I did, for my old nurse wrote to me and—"

"That'll do, Sonia!" exclaimed her husband sharply. "It won't make things any better for me, blaming Mr. Larose. He has his duty to do and indeed it was a kindness for him to come to us as he has now." He flashed round at the detective. "You haven't come to arrest me, have you?"

"No, no," replied Larose quickly, "no one as yet

knows what I have found out."

"And you have, of course, to inform against my

husband," went on Lady Marley contemptuously, "to keep up the reputation you have earned. You want people to still go on saying-"

"Sonia, Sonia," interrupted her husband imploringly, "you will make yourself ill if you go on like this.

Remember——

"I do remember, but I will speak just the same," cried Lady Marley, stamping her foot in her rage. "He shall hear what the man was whose death you are going to suffer for." She calmed down all at once and spoke very quietly. "Leave me alone, Jim, and I won't work myself up, I promise you." And she took out a handkers chief and began wiping the tear-stains from her face.

Sir James sighed and folding his arms resignedly, sank ck in his chair.

back in his chair.

"Mr. Larose," said Lady Marley very quietly and with no trace of emotion at all, "Captain Dane was a very bad man, whom I knew for one week, as I expect you have found out, five years ago in Ivybridge. He was very handsome and fascinating and I was an inexperienced and ignorant young girl. I was not only innocent but ignorant as well." She bit her lip and sighed. "I was barely seventeen and I fell in love with him. I was staying with my parents at the Ivybridge Hotel." She spoke in even, impersonal tones. "The last night that Captain Dane, or Captain Bonning as he was then, stayed in the hotel, he was turned out the next morning by the proprietress, my old nurse, Mrs. Pound, who found out what he had done—he—

"Sonia," exclaimed her husband in great distress, "it is not necessary for you to go on. Mr. Larose will

understand everything without you telling him."

"But I prefer to go on, please, Jim," replied his wife very quietly, and the baronet then immediately covered over his face with his hands. She turned back to the detective and she was trembling now. She hesitated a moment and then burst out: "He came into my room in the middle of the night, Mr. Larose, and—he stayed there until the morning."

A dead silence followed. Sir James made no movement or sound and Larose leant forward and glued

his eyes upon the carpet.

She went on: "I did not meet him again for just five years—until he arrived here as Captain Dane; and then within a few hours of his coming he was reminding me of what I had been to him once." She caught her breath quickly. "He thought he had me in his power, for he knew I had not dared to tell my husband, and he threatened me." She clenched her hands. "Yes, he threatened me and kept on threatening me until in desperation I—I——"

She was obviously upon the point of breaking down

and Larose interrupted quickly.
"You told Sir James," he said gently; he turned to the baronet. "And then you, sir, wrote that letter and pinned it on the frame of the mirror in his room." He looked very puzzled. "But how did you come to meet him in the billiard-room at all?"

"I went down there an hour later to get some brandy for my wife," replied Sir James huskily, "and almost stumbled over him before I saw that he was there. I told him in a sentence what he was and struck him with my open hand. Then"-he smiled grimly-" but you appear to know all that happened then."

"But why did you leave him like that," enquired

Larose, "after you had killed him?"

"I didn't know I had killed him," replied the baronet quickly. "I thought he was only stunned and in a few minutes would get up and take himself off. I didn't even look at him but just got the brandy and returned upstairs. The next morning—"

"Hush!" interrupted Lady Marley quickly. "Who's

that in the hall?"

They heard the sound of laughter and a gruff voice and

then footsteps approaching the door.

"Inspector Roberts!" gasped Lady Marley. Her voice broke in terror. "Jim, they're going to arrest you. Mr. Larose has brought him here.

"No, no!" exclaimed Larose angrily. "I've told you no one else knows anything about it and unless the girl has informed him, Inspector Roberts doesn't even know I am here."

There was a knock upon the door and it was opened

by the parlourmaid.

"Inspector Roberts," she announced, and the inspector walked briskly into the room, with the girl immediately closing the door behind him. The inspector contented himself with bowing gravely to Sir James and Lady Marley, but he advanced and shook hands with Larose.

"I hope I don't intrude," he exclaimed hesitatingly, noticing the blank looks upon the faces of the baronet and his wife, "but the maid told me Mr. Larose was here and I suppose she thought I was expected too, and just

showed me in."

"Of course you don't intrude, Mr. Roberts," replied Lady Marley quickly. "We are very pleased to see you. Do sit down."

The inspector, reassured, complied with a smile. He

was evidently, for him, in a very genial mood.

"It is just by chance that I've come," he explained. "I happened to be passing the gates and I thought I'd drop in and tell you about an extraordinary letter that I received last week." He paused as if quite certain he was going to make a most dramatic announcement. "I had a communication from the late Dr. Merryweather, written apparently the day before he died, and, although of course I attach no credence to it at all, still, I thought it would be of interest to you."

He searched in his pocket and produced a folded sheet of foolscap paper. "It's rather a long one," he went on, "and I won't bother you by reading it, but the gist of it is "—he paused and smiled ironically—" the gist of it is that he was of opinion that it was he who had caused the

death of Captain Dane."

A dead silence followed and the inspector was quite

satisfied with the sensation he had created.

Lady Marley looked stupefied, Sir James was frowning

hard, and Larose looked as if he had been unexpectedly

brought up against a dead wall.

"Yes," went on the inspector briskly, "and the poor man was so serious about it that he had drawn up the elaborate document here, and had it properly witnessed by two apparently responsible people." He laughed as if greatly amused. "But of course I don't believe a word of it, and shall not even take the trouble to forward it to the Yard." He looked towards Larose. "Mr. Larose and I are quite certain we know who killed the captain, are we not, sir?"

The detective nodded. "Yes, I'm quite certain," he

replied quietly.

The inspector laughed again and turned now to the others. "But he wasn't always certain, Sir James and Lady Marley, and I am sure if it had not been for that unfortunate bullet from your butler, he would be still lugging me along upon some wild-goose chase, looking for a different murderer." He smiled slyly at them and nodded his head. "Yes, I may tell you that we nearly came to a bad quarrel before I was able to convince him finally that it was undoubtedly the crafty impersonator of Slim who had committed the murder."

Lady Marley heaved a big sigh. "Dr. Merry-weather," she said very gently, "would never have

killed anyone. He was much too kind by nature."
The inspector looked a little dubious. "Well, I don't know whether I am quite prepared to admit that, your ladyship," he smiled. "I am always rather afraid of these doctor chaps. Pain and suffering and death are natural happenings to them, and until they come to have a twinge themselves, it's all in the day's work."

Silence again fell upon them all. Sir James Marley had a drawn, strained look upon his face; Lady Marley was biting her lip as if it were an effort to control herself, and Larose was frowning as if his thoughts were

unpleasant ones.

The inspector looked round covertly and being now of opinion that Larose and he had arrived close upon the

heels of some domestic quarrel, made a quick sign to the detective, and was about to rise to his feet, when the door opened again and the parlourmaid appeared, pushing before her a traymobile laden with the paraphernalia for afternoon tea.

Lady Marley had noticed the sign the inspector had made and interpreting it correctly, immediately forced

herself into a bright smile.

"You'll have a cup of tea, won't you, Mr. Roberts!" she exclaimed quickly, looking defiantly round at the

detective. "Mr. Larose is going to have one."

The inspector glanced questioningly at Larose and then, perceiving that the latter had acquiesced, agreed smilingly, and settling himself back in his chair, prepared to endure a short period of that sociability that he loathed.

And then followed in that little boudoir minutes of intense drama, with two of the actors there, however, masking their feelings with such success that a looker-on

would have noted nothing of tragedy.

The baronet threw off the agony of mind that was oppressing him, and in an easy, friendly manner pro-ceeded to engage the inspector in light conversation, while Lady Marley, appearing all at once to have forgotten her misery, joined in with smiling eyes and with her head held high.

Only Larose was left alone and he sat on with a face of stone. He was the skeleton at the feast and the executioner who was waiting whilst the victims partook

of their last meal.

He just stared and stared into the fire, seemingly quite oblivious to all that was going on, and he sighed many times.

He was reviewing everything that had led up to all that

was happening now.

He thought of Sonia Cator, the young girl of those years ago; her secluded upbringing and the serene peace of her home; her life bounded by the walls of the old rectory among the trees, and her sole companions her

father and mother and the good, homely folks of the

little village upon the river-side.

And then he thought of the man who had come suddenly into her life; the dashing officer with his handsome face and courtly ways—the travelled, experienced man of the world, hiding under his fascinating exterior the gloating longings of the satyr, the callous cruelty of the beast of prey.

And this man for the pleasure of a few hours, after the ruthless manner of a campaigner in a strange land, had snatched from her the tenderest memory of a woman's life, and the surrender that she could only give—once.

Then this man had gone away as suddenly as he had appeared, and with the realization, no doubt, of what had happened, she had been left with her bruised heart and

mind and with—her fears.

Gradually, in the course of time, however, the memory of the despoiler had in part grown dim, and another man had come into her life. She had learnt then what real love meant and had married the other man, hoping that her dark secret would be ever untold. And she had been happy beyond all dream, a queen in a kingdom that contained everything a woman could possibly want.

Then suddenly her enemy had reappeared and she was faced in a few hours with dishonour—or else the most terrible confession that any woman can make to the man

she loves.

But she had chosen the hard way and had told everything to her husband, and he, as a man of strong character would, had given pity instead of condemnation and had taken her back to his arms.

But the detective suddenly became aware that Lady

Marley was speaking.

"Oh, but, Mr. Roberts!" she was exclaiming reproachfully, "are you not sometimes sorry for the poor wretches you have found out? Have you never any pity at all? They are not always bad whom the law has to punish."

"I'm not paid for pity, your ladyship," replied the

inspector sternly, "and officially, I may tell you, I'm not supposed to have any feelings at all. It is the prevention and detection of breaches of the law that is my occupation."

"And you like your work?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. It's pitting my brains against those of other people, and I do my best to beat them every time."

"But you don't always succeed do you?" she smiled.

"No, not always," he replied, and then he smiled too, and with a half wink of one eye, raised his voice. "There's only one man who never fails."

Lady Marley caught her breath and then as if an idea

had come suddenly to her, she asked gently:

"And has anyone ever tried to bribe you not to do

your duty?"

The inspector laughed. "Not since I was a young policeman," he replied, "and then it was only with half a crown." He drew himself up proudly.

know better than to try it now."

Lady Marley was silent and he went on: "No, your ladyship, it's very few of us you could bribe. We're most of us, thank the Lord, men of honour, and we do our duty at all costs." He raised his voice again. "Is not that so, Mr. Larose?"

The detective came out of his reverie and smiled, and he smiled so nicely that Lady Marley felt her heart begin to jump. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Roberts," he said, "but what did you say?"

"That we police always do our duty, don't we?"

replied the inspector.

The detective looked surprised. "Of course," he said, and then he added gently: "When we realize exactly what it is." He looked across at the teapot and spoke. "I wonder, Lady Marley, if you would give me another cup of tea. I'm very thirsty."

Lady Marley could with difficulty restrain her tears. It was the old Larose who was now speaking, the Larose at whose bedside she had so often sat and not the Larose

who but a few minutes before had stood before them as their judge.

She complied at once and remarked at the same time

that he had had nothing to eat.

"No, thank you," he said, "I don't want anything to eat." He turned to the baronet. "But if Sir James would very kindly give me one of his cigarettes, I

would appreciate that."

For a moment the baronet stared as if astounded at the request. His face was perfectly composed but his eyes were as the eyes of some stricken animal in pain. His hand shook as he fumbled for his cigarette-case. He held it out to Larose.

"With pleasure," he replied very quietly.

The detective took the case and then smilingly offered it to Lady Marley.

"You'll have one too?" he asked, smiling ever so

gently. "The pipe of peace, you know."

She took a cigarette without speaking, for she would have broken into tears if she had attempted to utter a word. Quick in perception always, she realized somehow that a miracle had happened and that Larose was no longer unfriendly towards them. Surely then he was going to save her husband by not speaking and then her baby would be born with no shadow across its cradle.

The face of the baronet was now flushed. He had not the intuition of his wife but he could hardly believe it was in the nature of Larose to ask a cigarette of anyone

whose life he was about to ruin.

The inspector looked round, rather puzzled, for he had become suddenly of opinion that something out of the ordinary had been taking place under his very eyes and he could not make out what it was. He accepted a cigarette from the baronet's case and then for a few moments they all puffed silently.

Then suddenly the inspector turned to Sir James Marley. "It's unfortunate, sir," he remarked thoughtfully, "that we never got a confession out of that butler of yours, for it would have rounded off the case so nicely.

As it is, as I have remarked more than once to Mr. Larose, the requirements of the law have not been satisfied, for there has been no conviction recorded against anyone." He nodded his head. "Yes, it would have been a great feather in Mr. Larose's cap, but as it is "-he smiled dryly —"he has lost the fine sequence of successes that he had."

"Oh, please, Inspector," laughed Larose merrily, "don't for goodness' sake bring that up now. I'm

human and mortal like yourself."

"And another thing," went on the inspector, quite unperturbed, "I should have liked to have got back those notes your butler took, instead of them being burnt up in the car. I think-"

"One moment, please," exclaimed Larose, "and I think that at any rate I can retrieve my reputation there!" He took a sealed packet out of his pocket and broke it open. "Now what about these?" he exclaimed with sparkling eyes, and he handed over to the inspector the banknotes that had once been Captain Dane's.

Sir James and Lady Marley held their breath in amazement, and the face of the inspector was the very

picture of surprise.
"Gosh!" exclaimed the latter, "are these the two

thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds?"

"Yes," replied Larose briskly, "and I was going to bring them round to you this afternoon as a pleasant little surprise."

An angry glint came into the inspector's eyes. "You've been holding these all the time," he exclaimed,

"and you never told me!"

"Oh, no," replied Larose, laughing. "I've acquired them since I last saw you and I only got them the other day. I had a brain-wave during my illness when I was lying upstairs, and after some little trouble I found them where I was expecting "—he paused a moment to enjoy his triumph—" tucked away down in the back of one of those settees that had been in the billiard-room here."

"But I had got rid of those settees," ejaculated Sir James, "almost at once after my guests had gone away."

"I know that," smiled Larose, "and I had to chase them all along the South Coast in consequence. That was what I was doing last week."

The inspector rose at once to his feet. "We'll have to go now, your ladyshir," he said. "Mr. Larose will no doubt want to talk it over with me."

Larose got up too. "Good-bye, Lady Marley," he said. "I—oh——" He searched for a moment in his pocket and then producing a folded piece of paper, held it out to Sir James. "This is yours, sir, I think, and I must have taken it away with me by mistake. I found it after I had left."

The baronet received the paper with a white, impassive face but there was no tremor in his hands as he unfolded it. "Thank you, Mr. Larose," he said gravely. "I am very much obliged." And he walked over to the fire and

threw the paper into the flames.

"Good afternoon, your ladyship," said the inspector.

"Good-bye, Mr. Roberts," replied Lady Marley sweetly, and then when Larose and the inspector had preceded Sir James Marley from the room, she called out: "Oh, Mr. Larose, I had forgotten. I want to speak to you, please."

With a grimace of resignation, the detective returned and stood before her. She had taken a sprig of white

heather from her dress and held it out to him.

"Good-bye," she said faintly. "Mrs. Culloden sent me this this morning, from Scotland. She said it would bring good luck to my baby "-her voice choked-" and so it has."

Then suddenly she snatched up the detective's hand

and kissed it.

"Madam," exclaimed Larose huskily, "you are bribing me." And with his eyes suspiciously moist, he turned quickly and left the room.

One sunny afternoon about a year later, Gilbert Larose was strolling along the Brighton front when he suddenly heard his name called and turning, saw Lady Marley sitting in a big open touring car that was stationary by the rails. She was holding a little curly-haired boy upon

her lap.

He approached the car and an animated conversation ensued. He thought she looked more dainty and pretty than ever. He remarked how well she was looking, to which she replied, blushing prettily, that she could not help feeling well, she was so supremely happy.

At that moment her husband came up with another man, and after a warm greeting with the detective

introduced him to his companion.

"Mr. Gilbert Larose, a great friend of ours—this is General Crook, Mr. Larose."

After a few words Larose informed them that he was returning to London on the morrow and Sir James then expressed his great regret that they could not have the pleasure of dining together that night. Lady Marley, he explained, was going out to some friends, and he himself was engaged to dine with General Crook.

"And you'll dine with me too, sir," boomed the old general at once, when he had grasped the situation, "for any friend of Sir James and Lady Marley is a friend of mine. No, I'll take no denial. Seven o'clock at the Regency Club and "-he smiled with an assumption of great sternness-" military punctuality, if you please."

At five minutes to seven that evening, therefore, Larose mounted the steps of the Regency Club and

pushing open the door, entered its sacred portals.

"I want General Crook, please," he said to the hall "I was to meet him here at seven o'clock."

The hall porter started and then stared as if his eyes would drop out of his head. Then he looked down upon the ground.

"Very good, sir," he replied huskily, swallowing hard "Come this way, as though he had a lump in his throat.

will you, please?"

Most deferentially he preceded the detective and ushered him into the visitors' room.

Then his movements were like those of a panther.

pounced upon one of the page-boys and almost jerked him out of the front door.

"Fetch a policeman," he hissed. "Quick. There's

a man here we've been wanting for over a year."

A couple of minutes passed and then the thrilled page-boy returned with a burly guardian of the law who furtively loosened his truncheon as he came in.

The hall porter whispered a few sharp words in the policeman's ear and then they both strode resolutely

towards the visitors' room.

But they were forestalled by a few seconds, for old General Crook, leaning upon the detective's arm, was

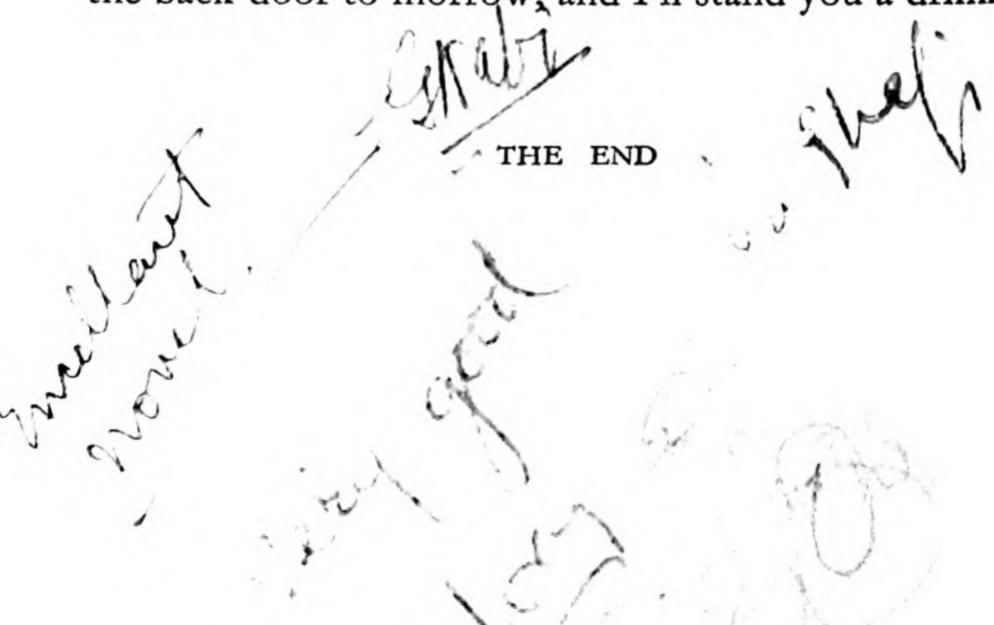
just emerging from the doorway there.

"I am most delighted to have your company, sir," the gallant soldier was exclaiming, "and consider myself highly honoured, I assure you. Come on. Sir James is already here, and it's 'quick march,' for I never believe in keeping a good dinner waiting."

The hall porter was thunderstruck. "A mistake, Constable," he gasped, "and yet I could have sworn that

I recognized that voice."

Then perceiving the disgruntled look upon the policeman's face, he added quickly: "Come round to the back door to-morrow, and I'll stand you a drink."



THE JUDGMENT OF LAROSE

A distinguished house-party was assembled at South-down Court, the home of Sir James Marley, when suddenly the peace of this country-house was shattered by the discovery of a terrible crime. One of the guests was found murdered!

Twenty-one persons with a murderer or murderess among them and no clues to indicate in which direction

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